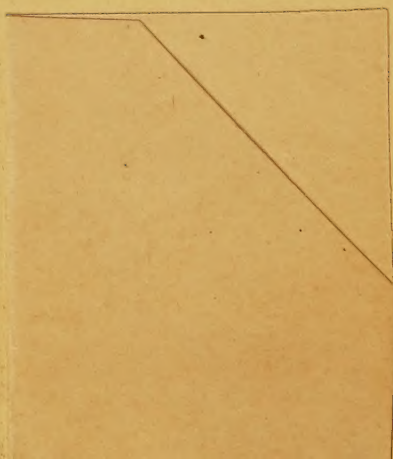

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also illustrated by

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BY HILAIRE BELLOC

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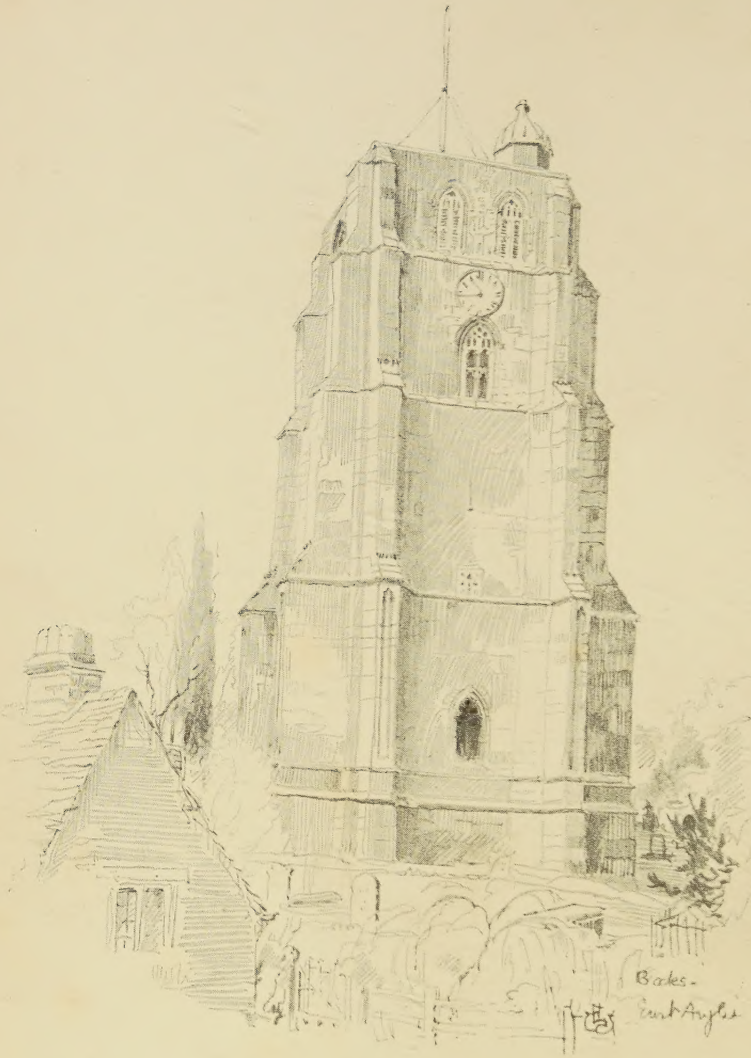

BECCLES CHURCH TOWER.

942

GREEN FIELDS OF ENGLAND

A Book of Footpath Travels

By

CLARE CAMERON

AUTHOR OF 'RUSTLE OF SPRING'

With nine pencil drawings

By

EDMOND L. WARRE

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1939

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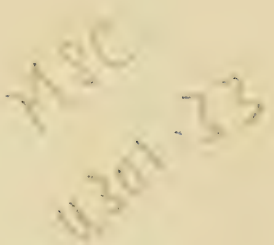

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T. 1621.

Green fields of England, wheresoe'er
Across this watery waste we fare,
Thine image in our hearts we bear
Green fields of England, everywhere.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH

FOR JOHN

MY GOOD COMRADE OF THE ROAD

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	ON THE CHILTERNS	3
II.	THE THAMES VALLEY	27
III.	IN THE COTSWOLDS	53
IV.	EAST ANGLIA	79
V.	SOME YORKSHIRE ABBEYS	109
VI.	ON THE WELSH BORDER	137
VII.	THROUGH CENTRAL WALES	161
VIII.	SUSSEX	217

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

BECCLES CHURCH TOWER - - - - *frontispiece*

facing page

EWELME - - - - - - - - - 22

BISHAM ABBEY - - - - - - - - - 38

THE COTSWOLD COUNTRY - - - - - - 58

SNOWSHILL - - - - - - - - - 74

FOUNTAINS ABBEY - - - - - - - - 124

CHIRK CASTLE - - - - - - - - - 144

MEIFOD - - - - - - - - - 180

ALFRISTON - - - - - - - - - 218

MIDSUMMER NOON

Here unto the beechen grove
In the burning quiet of noon,
Spirit of the Earth I love,
If it be thy will, come soon.

In my veins thy golden fire
Flows as through the living tree,
Thy kin in vigour and desire
Am I not a mate for thee?

In me sings the nightingale,
The blackbird and the willow wren,
Nor know by what fantastic tale
Came I to the world of men.

The hawthorn and the wild red rose
Tremble in my finger-tips,
And surge of darkling music goes
By the locked gates of the lips.

O lusty spirit of the wood,
From my body wrest me free,
And yield unto my burning blood
The joy thou mightest have for me.

And I will dance for you, my king,
As aspen in the wind of May,
As lark upon a quivering wing
From dewy bed at break of day.

Painting on the quiet grove
With these white limbs a chaste design
Of beauty and that tranquil love
That links its ecstasy to thine.

O godlike spirit of the wood,
In the burning quiet of noon,
Set upon the solitude
Thy seal immortal—soon.

CHAPTER I

ON THE CHILTERNS

I HOPE they are not many, those who have no secret garden of the mind. For this garden alone can give refreshment when life is barren of peace or sustenance or satisfactory answer. Such sanctuaries may be reached by a certain philosophy or faith, by the guidance of a beloved author or an understanding friend, by way of the temples of music and art, or by groping after truth through the vast kingdoms of knowledge. They encompass almost always truth and beauty, and are radiant with the light that never was on sea or land.

But they are not always to be found by seeking ; often one stumbles upon them with the suddenness of unexpected shock. The spirit bows down and worships then, aware of unworthiness, faltering its recognition and its praise.

There have been such places for me in the green fields of England—the fair, lovable country that is the most satisfying in the world. A spirit possessed those woods and valleys and pastures that was more than the spirit of the English tradition, but whether it would appear for others there I cannot tell. I can only write of the joy I had when I stumbled upon them.

One of them was not far away upon the Chilterns. It was a wood of young silver beeches, very straight and slim and evenly spaced, standing innocent and unknown at the top of a narrow lane which climbs from the little hamlet of Speen. It was enchanted ground, enclosed from the world as from the bright fields that skirted its

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edge, until the woodcutters came and the sound of the axe, and the voices ravished that lovely listening silence that was different from all the other silences I have known. Out of the brilliant sunshine, lively with bird and bee and butterfly, the sound of reaping or haymaking, one took the little path between the fences and entered the kingdom of faery. The trees closed behind as one entered in. The light at morning drifted through the glades in palest primrose, that changed imperceptibly through the long tranquil day to silver. No bird sang in the still branches, and the wind passed there with but a rustle and a whisper. There was no consciousness of time that breaks, of change that coarsens. Here it was now as it had ever been, dreamlike and perfect like those flowers of experience that come upon us unawares, when all life is concentrated in one shining moment. A sweet intangible place, spun not from leaves and bark and earth, but of the spirits of those mortal things. The slim trees, smooth of bark, without a notch or flaw to break their straightness, rose from the carpet of dead leaves like dryads, or youths and maidens on tip-toe in the first morning of the world. Their branches delicately laced the sky ; there was hush and expectancy, for what ? Assuredly they gave rapt attention to things that can never be made plain to mortal sense. Was it the hush that follows a great music recently ended, or the pause before it begins ? Might the imprisoning flesh and the groping brain have yielded a little if one had waited long and patiently, and the spirit within escaped to be one with that listening company ? My wood has its place in life no longer, but only in the recesses of thought where the silver trunks have made a sanctuary, not for me alone, but for all that beautiful, fleet-footed sister and brotherhood of the dream-life, who laugh and dance down the gleaming aisles in silence, eternally young, eternally vital and lovely. When I am

able to draw near they reach out their hands through the shadowy trees, and from the clumsy, wearisome flesh they draw me in.

There are other woods lying thick around Great Hampden that have this touch of dream atmosphere, though perhaps the chair-makers who have worked there for so long drove the fairies away long ago. For when Sir Philip Sidney was writing his *Arcadia*, these same woods knew the little, rough, straw-woven tents, cast about with old sacks in Arab fashion in the same manner that one sees to-day, the same primitive method of the lathe worked by the foot, that turns, with astonishing ease, rapidity and smoothness, the legs for the chairs of the Wycombe workshops. Neat piles of them stand by the tent openings, while the forest clearing is scattered with chips and shavings and the raw material of the prepared timber, with the pots and cans of the workers' dinners. There is no anachronism in this rustic factory, but rather a scene that contrasts sadly with the great temples reared to the god of Machinery, full of roar and speed and subordinate human automaton ; for out here is but the wind and the curious woodpecker, and health of mind and body for men who know spiritual independence, and enjoy as they create. There is a little book in circulation upon the subject of this charming retrogression, giving the details of a craft which is most fitting in the Hampden woods but tragically, absurdly inapplicable to the world at large.

Before they cut down the trees so extensively, there lived in one of the deeper glades old Stoney, a mild and harmless hermit of seventy, tall, lithe and supple, who bought his food with the odd coppers that he earned by watching the tents in the men's absence and performing small tasks for them. He lived in a similar tent himself, cooking his vilely-smelling ' shtews ' in a rusty can, amid

the shafts of sunshine pouring athwart his forest kitchen, and creeping forth on all fours at night to his pile of old rags that served him for a bed in the tent corner. The village children knew him well, and everyone was kind to him. For his was a sweet if strange soul. In spring he talked to the bluebells as if they were children of his nurturing, and touched the rough bark of the trees with that tender awe we give to our first love. His crooked song was heard afar, harsh and cracked enough but still recognisable as a croon of happiness. Autumn moved him to silence with its splendour, but in winter he was not seen much, though I doubt if he noticed the cold as much as we who are supposed to be saner and more sensible but are far more sensitive of body. The solicitations of friends and the enquiries of committee-meetings, like the driving rains and covering snow, failed to move him from his chosen home, but rumours of their efforts penetrated to his leafy solitude and awoke a dull fear in his mild eyes. At these times he would evade you if you met him, or if he trusted you, mutter in the almost unintelligible monotone that was his speech :

' No, no ! Let me be ! Me 'appy 'ere ! No workus for ole Stoney.'

Did they ever take him, I wonder, and wash and dress him decently, and place him upon a form at a long table with those who should have been his kind, and give him sheets to sleep between, upon a narrow bed free from vermin and the leggy creatures that he loved ? Did they see, in their charitableness, that he went to chapel on Sundays, to give thanks for his bread and meat, for the care and the shelter accorded to him in his helpless old age ? I hope not, with all my heart. But they would not keep him long, for at seventy one changes the habits of years with difficulty, and soon, I think, he would escape

into that Freedom which is wider than any forest, and kinder and wiser than the charity of men.

Edward Thomas, in that fine book of wandering, *The Icknield Way*, has a true account of a similar though cultured hermit. The story is curiously intriguing and piteous, and yet in some ways indicates that, for all the folly and failure of adjustment, the seeker was of the company of visionaries and those who, at times hardly sane, yet perceive the Truth that is hidden from other men. In the late winter the writer was walking the old road where it passes through the wild and lonely valley of the White Horse, in Berkshire, and recalling as he went the case of one Arthur Aubrey Bishopstone and his wife, who had been sentenced to seven months' hard labour for neglect of their seven children, while living in a lonely barn through the hard months of winter. He speaks of his discovery of the barn, 'in a small hollow at one of the highest points of the downs, three miles from the nearest hamlet . . . near a ruined farmhouse, among fallen masonry and elder and yew-tree roots,' of the desolation and beauty of the scene in winter, the bitter cold, and the wraith of a man with a child in his arms who accosted him faintly one evening on the hillside, some time before the arrest. He investigated the facts, and learned of the intermittent work the man was able to obtain, the inability to find a cottage, and permission to live in Lone Barn; of the illness of the children, of the birth of a seventh child on Christmas Day. Interested in the case and the few suggestive facts about the personality of Bishopstone, he again visited the spot through the deep snow of February, and paints a vivid picture of the beauty of the countryside and the forlorn barn, where the oak floor was pierced in many places by wear and drippings from the broken roof, where 'grass and corn had grown up through the

crevices and died,' and where 'a starved thrush lay dead in a corner.' A pocket-book, used as a diary, fell from an old coat lying under the straw, and therein was the curious, unhappy, disjointed story of this scholar-gipsy; it included literary notes made at Oxford, the noting of bald facts over a period of years, and epigram and philosophy that revealed the lonely, reflective soul of the ascetic. Thomas quotes from the diary:

'Each man suffers for the whole world and the whole world for each man. There is little distinction between the destinies of one man and another if this is understood' (1894).

'To him who is born into eternity it matters little what happens in time, and a generation of pain is as the falling of a leaf' (1897).

'Unhappiness is apart from pain. When they tell us that in the Middle Ages and even in the last century men suffered more pain and discomfort than we, they do not tell us they also had less unhappiness. Many a battlefield has seen more joy than pain, many a festival as little as either.'

'To have loved truly, be it for an hour only, is to be sure of eternity. Love is eternity. And if we have not loved, then also we are destined to eternity in order that in some other condition we may yet love.'

'Preach extravagance and extremes and ideals that haply we may achieve something above mediocrity. If we preach compromise we may not achieve more than desolation. And yet even out of desolation may bloom the rose' (1899).

'What name has my beautiful barn in Heaven? In it was born a man in sight of his brothers and sisters. God has told me my seed shall be multiplied as the sands of the sea. Can it be that out of this barn will grow the regeneration of the world, or will the forgotten memory of it trouble the well-being of some citizen far hence in time, and so give birth to a flame, a prayer, a rose out of the soul of him? It is cold, yes, but the frost is one of the angels. . . .' (part of the last entry).

With two of his children he died in the prison, but the young babe survived to leave with his mother and four brothers in the summer, and now Lone Barn exists no longer, 'only a square space of nettles, poppies and batchelor's buttons, amidst the turf. . . .'

There was a low cottage upon the lane that runs to the fairy wood, which I used to visit with great delight on summer and winter days alike. For it housed the happiest family I have ever known, until with startling suddenness Death stepped in. . . . It was good upon a crisp December morning to stride out from High Wycombe, to climb the pleasant breezy common of Naphill, and search for the right path among the dead branches of willow-herb across the hills to Speen, or to take the other road from Missenden, through Prestwood to Hampden, skirting the sombre, solitary woods. The shelter of a hollow tree was good enough spot for lunch, while a playful robin or two confirmed the pleasant fact that one was rather like a robin oneself, in the little short coat of many colours with the deep cuffs and border of fur and the fur cap. In the mid afternoon the heart leaped a little with excitement as the bright, armorial sign of the inn at Hampden, created by my friend himself, appeared round the edge of the trees at last, for now was the moment come to begin the familiar, joyful searching for the path to the silver wood. . . .

Upon my knock at the cottage the door was flung wide, and a great welcome accorded me. Peter's golden curls were like the bright locks of Hermes as he capered and shouted round the new visitor, and the grave-eyed dog, sleek and brown and dignified, came from the warm hearth to nose into my hand. Beautiful afternoon. . . . Outside it was still with frost and the hush of declining winter day. The red ball of the sun sank behind the ridge, and the reeds on the sill of the casement were

etched on the glowing circle. The young mother's face glowed as she brought the hot scones from the oven, and we gathered round our various mugs and plates. There was much laughter and chatter, and that pure pleasure in little things that only simple people know. Mary, ten years old, shook the long yellow hair from the candid brow that later would denote the fine, sensitive mind of the grown woman. Her brown eyes were grave one moment over the misdemeanours of Peter, and twinkling with uncontrollable merriment the next. Their father, a striking patriarchal figure, in a rough linen suit fitting for the hobby which was also his livelihood, surveyed them with amused content above the large tea-pot and the currant cake. I heard about the tiresome habits of Billy the goat and the new minorcas, of the personalities and tastes of a few distinguished neighbours, sidelights on the wide experiences of the past, opinions upon books recently read, and forceful ideas upon current events that were lit with the clear, cold gleam of a sound judgment that was especially theirs. Baby went to sleep on Daddy's lap as I tucked my feet beneath me on the settle, and the talk drifted on in the firelight. The grave dog half-slept, his chin on his master's knee, and the shadows cast by the spluttering twigs leapt and danced fantastically on the bare walls. Over me once again stole that warm appreciation and reverence for the quiet figure by the hearth, the fine profile outlined against the glow, that I have felt for very few people. It was typical of him that towards the end of the Great War he found it impossible to continue in his journalistic work. Rather than write to dictation he preferred to embody his feeling for truth in the simple labour of his hands. And so in the window of a little shop in H—— Village were seen those charming bronze plaques which were perfect in conception and design, and will be treasured as examples of the work of

an artist's craftsman. From there, for the sake of the children's health, he moved to the little Buckinghamshire cottage, and built his workshop beside, to continue with his wife's aid the craft that yielded no more pennies than were enough to maintain a very simple existence, but which gave much pleasure to them and the London shops they supplied. Indeed, they needed very little of what to us are necessaries. The play of the seasons through the woods and upon the hillside was their theatre, books and the storied miracles of Nature were their library, and the simple people around them their friends. A fuller and wiser education than that provided by the schools was given by mother, at the table in the sunny window every morning, and the garden provided the necessaries of the table. I was shamed by their rich, adequate life untouched by modern influences, as by their sunny content, as I sat, a city product with all its follies and mismanagements and wasted energies, in the shadow of the settle. But at least I could pay tribute to the blessing of the atmosphere, warm and innocent and kind, that was engendered by this aristocracy of soul; pay tribute to the commanding intellect and the charm of their simple, self-sufficient natures, to the insight that never failed to discriminate between the false and the true in people, in literature and in life. There was that dignity and large sanity about this artist craftsman that is granted only to great men, and with it went a loving heart that was Christ-like in its sweetness. I have met it but twice since, once in the presence of a great novelist, another in the society of a modern Sancho Panza, one of life's failures. Which seems to denote that these qualities have little to do with temporal affairs, with possessions or the lack of them, with worldly condemnation or contempt.

I went again in spring, and in the lush days of June,

when the forest scent was intoxicating beneath the burning sun, and Mary and Peter helped me to explore the cooler glades for specimens and for beauty. The long grass sang its smooth, rustling song in the summer wind as we walked the sandy lanes, and the dry leaves crackled beneath our feet as we turned homeward through the calm woodland avenues. We met no strangers on these wanderings, only a few cars in the afternoons, when people came out with picnic baskets to these woods that are not very well known to Londoners. The horizon was faint with mist as we came out on the narrow lane, and looked across the familiar green and blue valley, and sat on the doorstep among the flowers while the green peas and the new potatoes were 'finishing' for lunch. On the last afternoon I was there, a basket of strawberries was packed to accompany my journey, baby was tucked into the home-made go-cart, and all the family came to escort me across the hot scented fields and hillsides to Saunderton, and the train. I am a sentimentalist, and therefore, at the lane's end, in the hot languorous air of the swooning day, I kissed and smiled and gave thanks through a net of tears.

Upon a bright hot morning when spring was merging into summer, and the stalls of market day in the wide streets of Wycombe made a gay pattern of colour, I alighted at West Wycombe to walk to Risborough, and thence down by way of the Icknield Way to the river. I hoped the walk would not end shortly and ingloriously like that other of a year ago, when I had left my happy friends at Speen to explore that belt of wilder country round Fingest, Turville, and Swyncombe. The aloof, primitive beauty of those places is known to very few people, though the roads of Henley to the south of it and of Wycombe and Risboro' to the north are busy and familiar enough. Here and there the lanes wind fearfully

and narrowly at the skirts of overhanging brows, dark with woods that appear to be almost impenetrable at a distance, or smooth with steep green shoulders crowned with clumps of beeches. One or two of the villages have a lost, wild air that is almost savage, so that one is almost glad to escape them; but here too, appearing suddenly round a bend or tucked in a hollow, are little clematis-covered inns and rose-garlanded cottages quite unspoiled by discovery or modern innovation. The land looks as though it suffered a great upheaval in the primitive past, so fiercely rise the hills and so sharply drop the lanes. But incessant rain had driven me from those strange shuttered villages and goblin landscapes down to Nettlebed, Henley and home, where fireside comfort consoled a little for the loss of that river ramble. The air was tranquil and sunny this morning as I passed through the little old village of ancient inns, drooping roofs, and atmosphere of picturesque decay, recently acquired by the National Trust, and a startling contrast to the red villas of its large busy neighbour which encroach upon it. By the great sign-post at the crossroads just out of the village, there was complete solitude. The hill with its grey surmounting church shone clear against the sky, as I avoided the Bradenham road in favour of a narrower parallel one to Bledlow. The caves that extend for a quarter of a mile under the hill, mere chalk excavations but suggestive enough, were once believed to witness the wild doings of Sir Francis Dashwood and his Hell-fire Club, since it pleased local gossip then as now to build scandalous stories around all eccentric behaviour. It was easy enough, of course, since at Medenham Abbey, on the river near Marlow, which he restored in 1742 to be the headquarters of the Order of St. Francis of Wycombe (as he called himself after a portrait painted in costume by the Dilettanti Society)

were held those gatherings of modern monks about which little was known but much surmised. A colourful account which helped to engender the many prevailing legends is contained in *Chrysal*, a popular novel of the period, which was built on the few suggestive facts. But, despite the legends, I doubt whether the conduct of the famous club exceeded in daring or license that of our modern Bohemia, which seeks to express ordinary high spirits in sensational fashion, but which remains singularly artificial and unshocking, and to the unsympathetic spectator, often childish and dull.

In the church that was built by this maligned young man, who was nevertheless of a certain political benefit to his country, there is an ordinary armchair in place of the pulpit, and similar chairs, richly carved, that serve for reading desks. The eyes of Judas upon the painted ceiling have the unattractive though curious faculty of following one's movements across the whole church. There should be a fine view from the belfry, nearly 700 feet above the sea, as John Wilkes discovered when he wrote in one of his letters :

> 'I am just returned from a tour into Buckinghamshire, which has afforded me much pleasure. . . . I returned by West Wycombe, and passed a day in viewing the villa of Lord Le Despencer ; and the church he has built on the top of a hill, for the convenience and devotion of the town at the bottom of it. I must own, the noble lord's gardens gave me no stronger idea of his virtue or patriotism, than the situation of the new-built church did of his piety. Some churches have been built from devotion, others from parade or vanity ; I believe this is the first church which has been built for a prospect.'

The white chalk of the steep twisting lane dazzled the eyes as I climbed up between the hills to shady and pleasant Bledlow upon the ridge. It was very hot, and the head throbbed with the exertion. Already there was

a golden glow upon the beeches clustering thick on the opposite hillsides, and here and there the hedges were starred by the first wild roses. Bledlow's pleasant gardens and wide-spreading trees inclined me to linger, but there was also a wish to take tea at the little inn at Hampden, and wander through the familiar woods there again. As I approached, I spied a picnic party drawn up under a great oak, and here and there were tangled clearings, hot and scented under the burning sun, and littered with stumps and fallen logs, that but lately had been dim shadow of silver trunks and green glooms of leafiness. There were new people at the inn, who were as yet a little unfamiliar with their new home and work, so that the tea and the thick bread and butter and yellow cake tasted curiously of London, though it was easy to forget that fact as the eyes rested upon the golden light over the forest and the grass beyond the garden fence, until it paled and disappeared as clouds obscured the sun. Still there was the wild sweet solitude that has always characterised this spot, the leafiness of ancient woods that makes it one of the most beautiful in Buckinghamshire, though many things were not as they had been. I remembered that when I had passed the cottage at Speen the summer before, I had seen a tennis court, elegant flower-beds and a summer house where there had been but wild grass and daisies ; a group of laughing girls, elegantly-gowned, were then taking tea on a low table by the steps, where Peter and Mary, barefoot and with old sun hats upon their yellow hair, had sat upon Father's knees on the long summer afternoons, and listened, wide-eyed and grave, to the myths of Greece. Alas, he knows no longer the beautiful earth he loved, and of Peter and Mary I know nothing now. The page is turned.

Even the trees had a slight air of withdrawal and indifference, as though they whispered upon the rising wind :

'You have been away too long. You must wait to understand.' It is always so. Though we know to-day that no tree enshrines a dryad or hides a faun, the human spirit is conscious still of the subtle sensitive spirit of the tree, that like a good friend must be approached with the same respect and sympathy and imaginative insight, before the reserve parts like a veil to disclose the life within. One is not conscious of the falsifying influence the city has upon the heart, the clutter of the mind and the fog about the soul, until one has been a long time among the trees again, waiting for it to fall away like an old cloak, and leave that clean simplicity which is the only entrance to their company, as it is the only key to the complete understanding of earth's secrets.

The sun was lost behind gathered clouds as I descended the hilly road between the deep woods to Princes Risboro'. It was a gentle evening, cool and breezy after the hot hours of noon. Here and there an open gate leaned brokenly over a luring track that, black and deeply-rutted and appearing as old as time, wound darkly into the depth of the wood. The sun shone wanly forth again upon a clump of young larches, where the oaks and beeches fell away to allow them space to flaunt their beauty. I stopped a moment in the evening peace and silence, as it was thinly broken by the cool clear notes of a blackbird trilling from a dell within. Almost there was magic again, the expectancy, the bloom of the divine touch that had not wholly passed. The grey leaves quivered as the late sunlight fell softly upon bramble and bough, as the birds sought their nests. Depth upon depth of allure and mystery glimmered from the heart of the wood. I was glad there were none but me to watch and listen, for the spirit of beauty is chaste and proud, and reveals herself only to those who adore.

The road climbed and twisted past the woods and cornfields and a lonely cottage or two, to a cutting along the hillside beneath the white chalk cross of Whiteleaf. As the lane dipped below it, descending picturesquely between the trees and briars and past fallen trunks, Risboro' church lifted its welcome from the fields of the plain. The village life met me as I came down into the valley by way of the level road that joins Monks Risboro', with its beautiful old cottages and church, to its larger sister. There was once a palace of the Black Prince where now this picturesque, sleepy old town stands, and here too lived Sir Peter Lely the artist. It is now little more than a large pleasant village. The space about the cross was full of the last sunshine and of leisurely evening peace, as I entered the 'George and Dragon' beneath the swinging flower baskets.

Beyond Horsenden, next morning, I was directed through a farmyard to the green track of the Icknield Way, but beneath the rapidly pattering drops of a heavy shower and with no time to drag forth the mackintosh, I had to race up the hillside for the cover of a barn. A girl in breeches and leggings was tightening the nuts of a car within, but welcomed me with a smile, and I stood gratefully in its shelter and watched the silver net of the rain shake over the far green slopes and beat upon the flower-beds of the trim hillside garden. The cloud rolled over and the sun came out in beauty; all the air was clear and sweet beneath the lovely April sky, and the lilies of the valley lifted up their heads as I opened the gate to the green track, and went joyfully on between the spangled bushes and the singing birds. The old road, passing beneath the hills and ignoring the villages across the distant fields, with deep furrows worn here and there into the turf and lined with elm and thorn, appeared to be quite forgotten now by man and left to the wild

things. It was good to discover that there was yet much of the old road that modernity had not touched, but only time and weather had mellowed throughout the ages. It can be traced, they say, from Icklingham in Suffolk, the ancient capital of the Iceni, to Bath, and, some say, to Exeter. It is a road whose history reaches back so far that there can be few older in the kingdom, for it was a natural track when the Romans used it in their journeys from east to west, and man has needed to improve it but little through the ages. Upon some parts of it the sheep and cattle travel still, from Dorset into Buckinghamshire, from Anglesey into Kent, guided from the adjoining pastures where they would linger. Years ago the waggons of coal from Wales came this way, struggling up the hills to serve the villages. Edward Thomas, in the book recently mentioned, refers to the fact that the first roads originally were the paths made by animals in their daily search for food and water and rest, and tells of an old charter which defines this road as 'the way the cattle go,' and the derivation by another writer of the name from the British Yken, or Ychen, which means oxen. Battle ground and fairing ground has it been through the centuries, a lane for lovers, for pilgrims, and for fugitives, for the forbears of the ploughmen and the shepherds who, alone almost, take the old road to-day. The full pageantry of life has it known, for banners and spears and armour have followed the axe heads and the skins, and after them have come the sober habits of religious orders and the dun garb of merchants warmly clad against the winter weather, the bright robes of civic officials, the rustic smocks of shepherds and the bright shawls of girls. Across some of it, too, came possibly the Roman mails, carried, as was then the custom, by relays of hastening chariots which covered 400 miles in the day, a speed that is very near our modern system of

postage. Does the lonely traveller sometimes catch from the night-wind here, I wonder, that eerie sound that folk have heard upon the quiet and grassy Stane Street in the South, the swift thud of the hoofs of the ghostly chariots thundering on to Rome?

A solitary cowherd sitting among the wet grass to eat his lunch stared mildly as I passed, and once I almost tracked the cuckoo. The sign-post that pointed to Thame, seven miles to the north-west, awoke the pleasant memory of a week-end spent there in the most distinctive hotel of my discovery in England.

The great wrought-iron sign of the 'Spread Eagle' looks out across the spacious street of old historic houses there, to one of which John Hampden had been brought home to die. The painted tubs, with their little trees, make bright colour beside the door of that delectable hostelry, which is kept by a retired artist, John Fothergill, in the manner of an artist. A bust of Epstein and signed originals by Augustus John, Walter Sickert, and Tonks, and other famous names startle you from the walls as you pass to the large low dining room, hung with tapestries, and decorated like much of the rest of the hotel, in faint primrose and dull vermilion. At the small polished tables you will be served with soups and entrées of ravishing flavour but unknown origin, with crystals of pure salt from the mines, and to accompany your breakfast toast, honey from Hymettus. The wine list is hand-written in exquisite script upon parchment, and your choice must be submitted to your host's approval before he descends to the cellar for the key. Bowls of anemones, like the passionate glances of irresistible beauties, tease you from the dark corners, and by your plate stands a cool little posy of primroses or forget-me-nots. At tea-time there is a cake of subtle flavour made from a secret recipe, and dinner there should be approached with

no coarse, indiscriminate appetite, but with that appreciative thrill and respectful regard one brings to all masterpieces. There is great comfort at the 'Spread Eagle,' and ease and satisfaction for every sense, not least of which is the unique pleasure that awaits the literary traveller long familiar with the back numbers of the *Autocar* and *Motor*, bound copies of *Schools* and pictorial railway guides, that form the only reading matter in most hotels. For in the beautiful Queen Anne drawing room above, whose long windows embrace a view of much of the drowsy life of Thame, is an adequate library of first editions and belles-lettres and choice editions de luxe that is a surprise and delight to the lover of books. It may rain for days at Thame, but in the company of his cultured Bohemian host and the pleasures of his hotel the guest will be more than content. There are great four-posters in the bedrooms, that with their antique furniture suggest the comfort of a country house rather than a hotel, and the atmosphere is enhanced by the unobtrusiveness of perfect training with which the maids observe their duties. In the garden beyond the small lounge there is a Dutch garden, designed in a curious pattern by mine host, who has given the subject much study and published a book upon it a year or so ago. In early spring it is bright with tulips of every colour, and in May backed by a cloud of hyacinths that rise from the long grass before the orchard, where deep garden chairs invite among the bluebells, and where the grey old walls of the kitchen garden make delicate background. Not least among one's pleasures is the surprise of the bill, which is no higher than that of the average good hotel. I think it would be difficult for one of artistic sensibilities and epicurean tastes to find many flaws in the appointments and conduct of this ideal retreat, which bears down to its smallest detail the imprint of its fastidious proprietor. One may be amused

by the quaint bearskin cap above the lengthy black locks ; one may not agree with his rigid Tory opinions, or even (though this is doubtful) with his habit of refusing certain guests, whom he imagines are incapable of appreciation of the finer things of life, an attitude not to be confused with snobbery. But one must pay him homage, as he wanders to and fro all day intent upon that careful supervision which is largely the secret of his success, but willing always to stop for discourse or laughter with his guest, to conduct him to some beautiful old garden in the neighbourhood or historic piece. Needless to say, the visitors' book is a roll of fame, not to be signed by all and sundry, but only by those whose achievements or personalities have made them worthy.

At Kingston Blount I crossed the main Oxford Road to the green ride of the Way again, relieved to escape to the solitude from scurrying motor cycles and cars of Saturday afternoon. Soon the noise of them lessened and died behind me as the old road wound between gentle hills and through the fields, and past distant farms, leaving the villages behind. On my right hand soon, a mile away, appeared the thick woods crowning the lonely hills where I had been so nearly lost in the preceding summer. In the sunshine they smiled upon me with mocking invitation, so that I lingered over the thought of their cool glades, and looked at the road upon the map where it descended through the encircling trees to Swyncombe. But the taunt of them could not persuade me from my plans, and I paced evenly to Watlington, an old town asleep in the sun with no particular character that I could discover, but that of complete rep se from the disturbance of modernity. A group of laughing boys in flannels met me at a field gate where preparations for cricket were in progress, and a few flocks already fluttered about the seats. There was no other life

apparent in Watlington, for many of the shops were closed, and what diversions and interests there may have been were hidden from me as I passed through. I went back to the track again, that here was a path skirting a ploughed field, then a green ribbon edging a thin spinney, and again a lane twisting between high banks. A baby owl that matched the wood in colour and immobility blinked at me from a gate post, and a weasel or stoat, startled by the unwonted footsteps, fled into the hedge. As it neared Ewelme, the road wound between open downs, gathering the atmosphere of history as it ran wide and clear beside old Danish entrenchments in the windy solitude. The white clouds passed majestically over the vast spaces of the sky with slow and easy strength. The air was superlatively good out here. I enquired of a woman with a dog about tea.

'Oh yes! At Mrs. Clack's. On your right. Look for a blue flag.' The road swung round with a careless grace down in the village, and I cast but an indifferent eye upon Elizabethan walls and chimneys and the twisting lane ascending to the church, but instead sought thirstily for the flag. Two tall women were just emerging from the tiniest parlour I had ever seen, that adjoined Mrs. Clack's confectionery and grocery shop, so that I was requested to rest upon the sofa with copies of *Sunday at Home* and *Forget-Me-Not*, while the table was cleared and fresh tea made. It was a most pleasant little room, with its ticking grandfather and old walnut bureau, the cottage piano and family portraits and old-fashioned flowers, and tiny casement swinging above a front garden full of sweet williams. The room was full of country quiet, and in the shadow the clock spoke sonorously: "All's well! All's well!' As I sat there waiting, it seemed to mark not only the rhythm of Time but the very pulse of the Cosmos itself. A homely thing enough, but

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linking man with the eternal verities, inspiring affection, commanding respect. A staunch friend it might appear, to stand for changelessness in a world of change, for a watchful eye on dubious conduct but a tolerant judge in a world very prone to condemn. Warm with the atmosphere of comfortable, domestic things and the intimacy of years, it thus might come to appear not merely a thing of device but the living spirit of a friend in its homely, carved frame. Thus the simile 'as immutable as Time' would develop a personal meaning; thus might the wanderer and stay-at-home alike find in the wooden thing a stability, an invincibility, a calm unattainable by wavering man but ever sought by him. Like the finger of an ideal beside the hearth. . . . A man might pray to it as he prays to other symbols, the cross, the altar, the idol in the shrine, pray not from pretty fancy but from need, pray the more sincerely because of his belief in its symbolism: 'Steady me, friend, with your steadiness. Calm me with your unchangeable calm. Make me stoic in trouble, unspoiled in joy. Communicate to me the dignity and patience, the wisdom and the truth, that I see in you, that I may fulfil my destiny as man and take my place with happiness and content in the divine order. . .' Surely that would not savour of superstition any more than the other forms which are intermediary between God and man.

The tea was very good in the thin china service, and the food various and plenteous. Mrs. Clack herself came to stand in the doorway and chat a little in the intervals of business, to make kind enquiries upon the tea, and give me her confidence upon domestic ups and downs, and interesting information about the village. Upon her advice afterwards I left my bag with her and stepped into the blazing late afternoon sunshine to visit the church. Proudly and tenderly the old verger, like a

mother or a rapt lover, exhibited the bright colours upon the two splendid tombs, preserved with care since the fifteenth century. He bade me kneel that I might see the same blaze of blue and crimson and gold beneath, designed in a day that attached as much importance to the unseen as the seen. James Hissey, the writer of many books of wanderings, thought there was 'no tomb so beautiful in all the land, no, not in Westminster Abbey,' as this monument to Alice, Duchess of Suffolk and foundress of the church, who died in 1475. The niches beneath the alabaster of her reclining figure are radiant almost with the gold and colour of the winged figures they enshrine, and the emblazoned shields of the coats-of-arms they bear. The other is an altar-tomb to Sir Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet, with effigy of brass. The floor is rich in the possession of fifteen brasses of knights and priests, dating from 1458 to 1517, and I do not remember to have seen so many in such good condition in any little country church before. With a note of tenderness in his voice, the verger spoke of the providence that saved the church from the whitewash and the destruction of the despoiling Cromwell, and moved to resume his duties as he pointed out the little door that led down to the almshouses attached. A few steps led out of the shadow into the sunshine of a small square garden, where twelve little houses with big dormer windows and overhanging roofs supported by oak posts, thus forming a cloister, were ranged round a sundial. There was that dignified beauty and tidiness and peace there befitting old age, which has so few wants, and little plaint or perplexity that the sheltering church could not appease or make plain. The empty and silent place, folded up in quiet, laid peace-bestowing hands upon me as I shut the wicket gate and passed into the road, to seek Mrs. Clack again and resume my journey to Benson.

But the showers had not entirely passed, and again I had to race through a muddy farmyard in the downpour to the shelter of a barn, which, as I discovered for the second time that day, housed the family car. Two sisters, clad in waders and overalls, busied their grimy hands upon its weekly cleaning. Their cheeks, flushed with health, glowed from the shadow as I asked temporary admission. It was a long shower, so that I was glad of the entertainment of their quick clear voices and their graceful movements. One was of uncertain age, small and dark and decidedly plain in the shabby waterproof, but I could have listened to her voice for hours, and lingered in the strength, serenity and good humour that flowed from her vivid presence. The other was young and radiant, and with a bloom upon her soft cheeks that is not too common to-day. As she picked her way among the pools with the petrol and the oil can, and rummaged under the car seat for lost tools, she reminded me of Hardy's Tess, so graceful and voluptuous were her movements, so sweet and candid the expression of her eyes. Soon it was time to call in the cow, whose warm sides steamed as she lumbered through the gate to the warm straw of her byre beside the barn. The cloud lifted at last and the blue sky smiled again, and through the last drops I thanked my smiling friends, and sniffed the beloved wet farmyard smells with a greedy delight as I passed into the lane for Benson.

APRIL HYMN

To the voice of the running water,
The bird on the blackthorn spray,
To the primrose hid in the bracken,
To the prince of the sun, I pray,
Teach me, O God's sweet angels,
The Truth, the Life and the Way.

To the wind of the April morning,
The calm of the noonday hour,
Unfurling on field and forest
Soft as a silver flower,
My hands on my breast are folded,
Imploring their peace and power.

To the foal in the emerald meadow,
The lamb and the crooning dove,
To all His innocent creatures
In pasture, valley and grove,
I pray, and I wait for wisdom,
Bowed at the feet of Love.

My Lord of the field and forest,
The kingdoms of light and shade,
As slowly Thou paceth yonder
The peace of the gentle glade,
Wilt Thou see in the grasses
Where my worship is laid ?

CHAPTER II

THE THAMES VALLEY

I WAS still wet when I turned into the village, and was glad to note that the 'Crown' showed as pleasing an exterior as I had been promised. At once I dropped my knapsack in the white porch, and was soon shown into a little white bedroom, with its own lavatory basin, and central heating that was deliciously warm to my damp body. There was a pleasant picture too of the inn yard, the clatter and bustle of which is exciting always, and lawns and orchards beyond, wakening to faint colour in the reviving sunshine. It was not yet dinner time, so I sought the river. How beautiful was that twisting lane after the rain, laid along the water's edge like a caressing arm. Every thrush and blackbird made music as he shook the sparkling drops from the chestnut boughs and the heavy elms, and those tall bushes that had been rich with lilac in the spring. Every blade of grass glistened, and every flower held up its grateful little cup of wine. Such scent there was from earth and tree and blossom that I was almost impelled to pray for rain every day, so long as it were followed by such an innocent evening sky and such music of full-throated joy. I had forgotten I had been so wet. I turned by the church tower and, within the inn again, conscious of clamouring appetite, consulted the red-cheeked maid about dinner.

Sunday morning was wild and stormy, with a sky full of racketing clouds. I had no desire to wait in Benson, however, and found a pleasant road thick with trees and well-kept pastures going south. But alas, the Icknield

Way, when I turned upon it, was different far from yesterday. Here was no rough and turfy track, edged with old trees that leaned against the wind, but a straight road of tarmac that led over open hills. Rather weary of it and in search of a drink, at eleven o'clock I followed a signpost to Ipsden, and was glad therefore. There was no refreshment to be had in this forgotten spot that seldom sees the motorist, but there was an old English charm and indifference to the affairs of the world that won my forgiveness at once for lack of inns. The children stared from the jasmined cottage doors, chickens pecked in the grass under the heavy orchard trees, and a woman stooped over the pail as she drew it from the well. Up on the hills the clouds of morning sailed quickly over the woods that sheltered this little cup of fertility, and the light made colour and shadow on the slopes, on the white hillside paths, and the roofs of the barns. There was a feeling of activity here too, though little was evident, an air of sufficiency that remained untroubled year after year by all that passed on the main roads beyond, as its look of peace and charm was undisturbed by any modern touch. It was a pleasant half-hour I spent that morning, too, under the elm at the village's end, in talk with a courteous stranger whose serene, cultured mind reflected curiously the spirit of the place.

After that it was hard going over the bare hills to Goring. The wind cut sharply and without ceasing across the fields unprotected by hedge or tree, so that, weary and very hungry, I saw with relief the first villas of Goring at last, and turned by the ' Miller of Mansfield ' towards the fine bridge over the river that separates Goring from Streatley. The water dashed angrily over the weir, and the reeds rustled and swayed. It was decidedly not a ' river ' day, and there was no craft anywhere in sight. The famous mill, too, a romantic

picture familiar for years, was now half-burnt down. The dining-room of the 'Swan,' whose large window looks out across a lawn to the river and Goring church among the trees, was unpleasantly full. But lunch to-day of reasonable quantity and quality, I must have. Over the salmon and cold chicken, and with a slight melancholy, I thought of the summers past, many and beautiful and never to be forgotten, tasting the varied delights of this loveliest bit of England. . . . The long lazy days of June when we had paddled slowly downstream from Pangbourne, past the deep solitary woods with their green and silver glades and impenetrable thickets, past rounded shoulders of the downs, and Basildon church tower beyond the fields of standing corn, beyond the stately mansion on the hillside at the bend, resisting the lure of shady backwaters and the smooth, daisied banks, to pull up at last by the tubs of geraniums and scatter the baby ducks, as we sank into chairs on the lawn and ordered drinks. Wanderings, too, on misty summer mornings, through the wet grass by the river's edge, by that path that goes among foxgloves and forget-me-nots, buttercups, ragwort and meadowsweet, past coppices and well-tended lawns and hedges heavy with roses, before the low white fronts of houses with their trailing wistaria and wide verandas, until we came to Streatley at last, and the cool emptiness of the inn; or crossed the bridge to the 'Miller of Mansfield,' with its welcome of oak settle, yellow cushions and bowls of flowers, the cold chicken and the trifle that seduced one always into a second helping.

One might discover, too, that the Old Rectory, opposite the 'Miller,' was still empty and for sale, and push the white gate to wander for a few precious moments round that perfect old English garden, with its tangled shrubbery and orchard, its quiet lawn beneath the great tree, the

rose-garden full of flowers. It was pleasant to linger beside the ivied stable with its broken window and weather-stained walls, and feel the bird-sweet peace, which centuries of gracious living had bestowed upon the place, pass across the heart as blessing and caress. Once within the gate, amongst the forget-me-nots and irises, and blackbirds, one forgot all the coarse and unkind things of life, the urgent, the cruel, the ugly, the unjust, the things that wound and break and embitter, the things that are hard to remedy or make plain. The spirit took on a gracious, quiet demeanour that paced with happiness and meditative content through the long grass, to where the tall French windows looked out across the wide lawn to the shrubbery, awaiting their rightful owner to slip the keys within the rusty locks. There was no consciousness of emptiness in the low white house, for the spirit of the garden had crept through the crevices and over the old quiet floors to wander and linger there, until that time when man should take it with love to his heart again, or boorishly drive it away. I hope it is empty still. There are so few worthy of that mellow English peace and dignified charm which distinguishes our old English manors and rectories. The birds are happy beneath those untroubled eaves, and for the jarred in spirit and disillusioned in mind there is healing there among the flowers.*

The journey back by path or river would be prolonged invariably until sunset, and sometimes after that an unknown tenor voice would tremble from afar over the silent water, rich and low and sweet, so that the wings of homing birds, sky and golden light faded almost imperceptibly within the summer dusk, and the night came down tender with romance. After dinner, coffee was brought to one's deep chair in the large garden of the

* The old Rectory has since become a private hotel.

'Elephant' Hotel, where yellow roses drooped and the great walnut tree nodded across the lawns to the church wall. Dark was the shrubbery there, with dew on the grass, and grave and serene stars twinkled through the faintly-moving branches. There was a sudden catch of the heart and sob in the throat. . . . Magical midsummer night! Relieve me of the hurt of your beauty!

There were few upon path or river in those idle days, and we sat alone upon the lawns of the once-famous river inns, which are as pleasant and inviting still as any to be found in England. The Thames is out of fashion, and there are not many willing to exchange the speed and stimulation of the car for the punt drifting beneath green branches, among dragon-flies and water-lilies, not many who can play successfully to-day the pleasant game of doing nothing. Camping, too, is not popular in our erratic English weather, so that there are few tents upon the banks between Maidenhead and Oxford in the modern summers. But I am glad. For here on the upper reaches, the Thames dreams on in loveliness that changes very little; for few of those unappreciative folk with gramophone and smart unsuitable clothes, who are not truly her lovers, come up so far to disturb her peace. Beautiful and beloved Thames, I think of you tenderly for the poetry of those drifting days and nights that I have spent beside you—in clear mornings when larks mounted above me, as I lay in those poppied cornfields not far from your brink, where the Berkshire downs begin—on many a warm scented twilight in a deep chair among the silence of friends and tobacco smoke, while swallows skimmed the breast of the water and the evening sky spread her soft fans of colour above. I muse upon a night of rain upon Streatley Bridge, and a picture of the lighted veranda of the 'Swan' across the black water, a gold panel beneath a black silhouette of leaves, whereupon

were printed motionless figures in graceful repose, like decorations on a screen. Again, a night of falling mist that was too soft for rain, and the summer darkness calling along a road that led beneath shadowy trees out to the open fields, and enchantments unknown by day, a road that led it mattered not where in that beautiful hour. The tug at the heart on the mind's refusal, the ache in the breast, the indefinable yearning that responded to the all-pervading magic, breathing from quiet tree and dim field and the soft summer rain. The night was sad as I turned with homeward footsteps, and every bough was a dark, pleading hand out-reaching. 'Stay, stay!' and 'Come, come!' But I did not stay, and it seemed the night stood back rebuffed and sorrowful as I went up slowly to the lamplight under the leafy porch of the 'Miller,' and turned my back upon the rare and beautiful one who might not call to me with such love again. . . .

Lunch was over and the dining-room was now half-empty. I took my coffee to a quiet corner of the sitting-room, open to the river, and soon after left the other pleasure-seekers pacing upon the lawn and giving unhappy glances to sky and water. With slow gait and much heavy breathing consequent upon the lunch within, I climbed Streatley Hill. The famous view was of sombre tones to-day, but it was quiet and sweet in the woods at the top, so that I knew again the familiar and beloved companionship of the trees that is possible only in solitude. Here, too, again I was upon ground that the Romans, Saxons, and Danes had trod, for this forest track was part of the same Icknield Way whose forks, the Ridgeway and the Portway, can be seen running west and north across the hills to unite again where the other end of the county enters Wiltshire. By field paths over the Downs I came soon to a lane that led to Hampstead Norris and Yattendon, but it seemed a long and twisting

lane in the sunshine that now burſt forth in blaze and heat upon the day. But there would be tea at Hampſtead Norris, and reſt for ankles twiſted by the ſtones. It was late when I reached the village, for old people in Sunday bonnets and capes and well-brushed suits were making gossiping way to church. The firſt inn looked forbidding, and I was not surprised to be refused by the unkempt old woman who peered round the reluctantly-opened door. There was no reply to my knocks on window and door of the second inn, and obviously none ever wanted tea in Hampſtead Norris. Two small boys were moſt anxious to help, and ran to look for Mother. But she was not at Mrs. Biggs, nor at Mrs. Fones, nor at Auntie Annie's, so they didn't know where she could be! And they were very sorry, but they didn't see how I could have any tea, although they hadn't had any either! There was nothing to do but add a penny to my smiling thanks, and plod on through the duſt to Yattendon, not much more than a mile away. It was a very long mile, though the fields of wild flowers smiled under the evening sunshine of the Sabbath, and bells rang pleasantly and lovers laughed as they ſtrolled. Can a woman appreciate anything when tongue and head and temper crave for tea and its reviving power, as eagerly as the thirſt of man cries for good brown ale? Yattendon had a neat and picturesque air, with its old beamed houses ranged in a half square before the inn, where tall trees ſtood guard at the casements. Nature's hands had been bountiful here, and man had entered into intelligent and sympathetic co-operation with her, to produce and maintain this flowery, tidy cluſter, that breathed on the Sabbath evening a full prosperity and content. Among the liſt of parish councillors I discovered the name of the poet-laureate, Robert Bridges, and guessed there muſt be several of his temperament and taſte who had chosen to

settle here. But there was no room in the inn, or the whole of Yattendon, for workmen were repairing a mansion close by and were billeted everywhere. Tea, of course, I might have, and I did. With aunts and uncles and cousins who had been visiting, and now made feeble but much-enjoyed jokes as they gripped their bunches of flowers, I hovered on sore feet for the Reading bus. There was nothing to do now but seek shelter at Pangbourne, which I had wished to avoid for reasons of expense and distaste for main roads. But it was a jolly journey. About forty of us shook and bumped and collided in a bus made to hold ordinarily about twenty people. The sunlight lay level over the pastures and gilded the tops of the trees, and gave silky sheen to the smooth flanks of the cows swinging home with rhythmic gait to the byres. Still there was sunset in the sky when, racketing in a devil-may-care fashion, we descended the hill into Pangbourne, where a marvellously-comfortable bed in a high oak-beamed attic of the ' George ' received my weary body for the night.

The casement swung wide on a sparkling morning, with promise of heat to come, so that very quickly I stowed my things in the knapsack, and breakfasted and paid my bill, which, though reasonable enough for a comfortable river hotel, had sadly depleted my resources. There was just my fare home, and a few coppers to spare. Could I manage through the day on that ? The weather was fine and my spirits high, and tramps lived on less ! Also, there was a full book of stamps in my pocket for a real emergency. O why go home in such weather though the pocket was light ! Blithely I paid my half-penny toll on the bridge, and climbed that delectable road that ascends beneath shady trees and by high chalk banks, by rose-garlanded cottages and inns to Whitchurch Gate. There had been a party at some big house in the neigh-

bourhood, obviously, the night before, for at a turn in the road I discovered three men in tail coats and bowler hats, assistant waiters or butlers, strolling on before me. How black, unpleasant, and thoroughly inappropriate they looked in the lane, suggestive of all that artificial life which is at its worst in the open air. There was something unhealthy, almost evil, about that garb on a road used to the dun and russet of shepherds and ploughmen, and I was glad to hasten on and forget them. Checkendon was hardly awake as yet, although the morning was hurrying on. It browsed in beauty of weathered timber and ancient brick, and arranged itself in dignified repose, as though here too the world had never penetrated to disturb. The bright morning face of a policeman attracted me as he leaned upon his bicycle in the shadow of the smithy's shop, while the sparks flew from the ringing anvil within. Had I the courage to ask his advice about the sale of stamps? I was very thirsty by now. . . . He prepared to mount his bicycle, and I approached. He listened gravely, as one man to another, as I explained the situation.

'Well, she *might* buy 'em, or she mightn't,' (referring to the postmistress). 'Not really allowed, you know! Been in similar plights meself, many a time. Know how to sting you all up the river, and all round the coast, they do. *I* know! And no reductions for cyclists, *or* walkers. Hmmmmm.'

He paused a moment, one hand on hip, until an idea brightened in his eyes. 'You take this and get a drink. Been in similar plight meself. . . . Good luck!'

A shilling was pressed into my hand, and before I could recover he had quickly mounted and rode on. 'O, but really. . . . Please have my stamps! I . . .'

My stammerings failed to reach him, for he was already

well down the road waving a hand as he went. I lingered over the lemonade, amused and gratified, and very ready to chat with the genial landlord, who exhibited the usual surprise at my walking alone through the land for pleasure, though he agreed thoroughly with my tastes, and proved to have wide knowledge of most of the philosophies. . . .

The road to Rotherfield Peppard is rich with little hills and sudden beautiful views of dipping fields and spinneys. It is quiet and winding, with honeysuckle in the high hedges and plunder for bees and butterflies. Soon one comes to a noble pinewood, where the sunshine falls in flecks of silver and no bird calls. One cannot hurry through the wood, for into the blinding light its shadow reaches cool, caressive fingers. One looks up to the pines, so straight and of undaunted strength and purpose, to the deep blue of heaven beyond. The thoughts become sober, and gather themselves to bow a moment at the feet of the trees, who are God's children and bear His secrets, and worthy of man's worship therefore.

It was very hot in the lanes now, but a welcome breeze sprang from the common of Rotherfield Peppard, high and spacious and scattered over leagues of soft turf. There was a voice at my back, and my policeman dismounted beside me.

'Aren't you finding it hot? I've been thinking about you. Sure you'll want ices and things to-day! Here's a bit more to help. No refusals! Been in similar plight meself. Good-day to you!"

With the same smile and speed he slipped another shilling into my hand, and before I had time to thank him, was waving a farewell as he rode on to his business in the next village. I shall never forget his kindness and tact, or cease to hope that he will find many friends

of his own good nature when 'he is in similar plight himself.'

As I came into the tree-lined road of Rotherfield Greys all life was suspended behind shaded windows and doors. I tried to buy fruit, but oranges and bananas only came round on the cart two or three times a week to this tiny hamlet, which, in the midday heat, was like a sleeping girl lying flushed and smiling in the unconscious beauty of voluptuous youth. Heavy were the trees, and the scent of corn and blossom, and the slow wings of the butterflies over the long grass. Heavily drooped the hot blue sky, and the faint notes of sleepy birds in the thick shadow of the leaves.

Dusty also was the road, that led straight and unsheltered to Henley. My discomfort in the heat must have been obvious to the driver of the two-seater that I heard slowing down beside me. He turned and smiled enquiry as he pointed to the empty seat beside him. I shook my head and smiled back.

'Not going far, thanks!'

After the colour and temporary excitement of the regatta, the dignified town of Henley goes to sleep for the rest of the year, but this afternoon there seemed life enough around the wide streets and on the spacious road of artistic little shops which leads to the noble bridge. There was the two-seater again, stationary by the roadside, and obviously I was not meant to be let off so easily.

'Hot for walking to-day. Come far?'

I liked his candid face, and soon we were gossiping upon the rival pleasures of walking and motoring. I liked his ready understanding and his points of view, so that as we talked I reflected upon the joys of a journey home by road instead of in a stuffy railway carriage. We promised to meet by the bridge, after tea. Very refreshing was the breeze on the heated face as the car glided down the

wooded road to Hurley. There awoke in me the memory of the leafy lane that runs past the leaning old front of 'The Bell' there, with its beams and whitewashed walls, and hints of cool shadow over the ancient floors within, to the banks of the river beyond and the many islets. Memories, too, of the stately grey front of Bisham Abbey, in appropriate setting of green lawns and the dark Quarry woods rising steeply behind; of Marlow, the popular resort, and once the home of Shelley. Here he wrote the *Revolt of Islam*, and Mrs. Shelley her famous *Frankenstein*, while William Godwin and Leigh Hunt were among their frequent visitors. The Crown Hotel, too, in a later day, received George Gissing, Grant Allen, William Sharp and their friends, and served many good and remembered dinners to the Omar Khayyám Club. It is a pleasant centre. At Easter, if you take tea on the lawn of the Ferry Hotel, you will know the enchantment of the cherry trees that wave their white arms before you and the tall church across the water; and on summer eves the large rose-embowered garden by the weir will lure your feet.

We were almost in Maidenhead, and I roused myself to take interest in my companion's reflections and anecdotes.

'I have to stop in Windsor. Do you mind waiting awhile, or would you rather get a train from there?'

I said I preferred the latter, and soon we swept beneath the grey walls of the castle bright in the sunlight, and received the benison of that wind that seems to blow always about the hilly streets, and over the clean cobble-stones of that delightful town.

Later I explored the upper reaches, and was not disappointed of expected beauty.

Yet the first mile or so on any road out of Didcot is depressing to the sensitive traveller. One cannot

BISHAM ABBEY.

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recover quickly from the influence of that small but unlovely spot, and on grey days the flat fields wear an unfriendly look that is foreign to this soft and gentle countryside. One feels better on approaching Sutton Courtney, especially in the fall of the year, when misty light and flaming tree lays enchantment on the land. . . . We stopped to eat our midday meal beneath a broad sycamore by the roadside, while the red and yellow leaves fell slowly, as if to dance for us a stately measure at our simple feast. The faint sun shone on the russet roofs of cottages beyond, and michaelmas daisies nodded from the fence. A robin cocked an eye, and disappeared. Somewhere a sweet chime sang the hour, and an axe rang faintly in a far garden. A little way beyond, the life of the village went on, quietly and without haste. There was blessing in these moments of benign sunny peace, that slowly sank into the memory to make a picture of gracious beauty.

With no great surprise although with much pleasure then we passed the noble front of the manor-house, framed by great gates and glowing in the golden light. Late red roses drooped across the path, a peacock cried from a guessed terrace beyond, and as we lingered, our thoughts fashioned the banqueting hall within, the oak wainscotting and the minstrel's gallery (which actually exist therein) and all those traces of high pomp and dignity that are the glory of our English manors.

Through shafts of misty golden light we wandered round the churchyard, that a year or so later was to become the last resting-place of one of England's premiers. Upon the rich English soil, in the mellow atmosphere that is the fragrance of Sutton Courtney, is fitting repose for commoners and kings.

Slowly after that, for to hasten appeared unseemly, we idled past the half-timbered houses and into the open

country to Clifton Hampden, where the thatched roofs gather comfortably like old ladies with spread brown capes. Do you remember, my friend of those few sauntering days, the long dipping thatch of the Barley Mow, and the long tendrils of red creeper that drifted to and fro between the tea-table in the arbour and the setting sun, so that the leaves seemed all on fire before us? Do you remember the shafts of sunshine through the apple-tree, the smell of wood smoke upon the keen autumn air, and the content of that hour?

A small child stepped clumsily down from the most charming Post Office I have ever seen; it was general shop also, and leaned snugly back beneath the boughs, with a smile for the orchards in the hollow across the road. Down by the river the water flowed so silently that it had almost a lake's stillness, as if obedient to the benediction of the grey church lifted a few steps from its edge. There was still the colour of fire on its bosom as it flowed by the feet of the alders. Was there anything in the world that could break the spell of this peace of the upper Thames? Rumours of wars and personal calamity might afflict the lives of the people, and the gillyflowers and hollyhocks straggle untended among weeds in the cottage gardens, but never surely could there be blight upon the land, whose crops were so well-watered by the never-failing river and pastures enriched for the cattle, whose orchards were kissed to blossom and fruit by the sun in the warm hollows. A sweet and happy country for the water's wandering, from that secret spot in the grey Cotswolds, by reedy ways to Oxford and the quiet meads to Abingdon, drifting still in solitude beneath the shoulders of the Berkshire downs, to the flowery fields of Goring and Pangbourne, the loveliest stretch of all; hastening a little, but indifferently, through Reading, as though stoically aware of the large commercial hand laid

upon its breaſt, to shake it off soon with joy again, and run north through beautiful Sonning to Henley and the high Quarry woods above Marlow, through Cookham, Maidenhead and Bray. After Windsor it wears its youthfulness no longer, but is grave with approaching maturity. Soon Man has utilised it for his pleasure and his use, and as it flows ſtrongly and inevitably to sea, it becomes a beaſt of burden, beautiful ſtill, but nobler now with all its many craft, as soberly it bears them to the eſtuary.

In the twilight, we crossed the ſtone bridge that looks to the abbey in the wet and reedy meadow, and came to Dorcheſter. The lights blinked from oil lamps behind the tiny leaded panes, illuminating but faintly this village that breathes ſtill the memory of those busier days and wider intereſts when she was a cathedral city. It is over eight hundred years since she loſt that office, but Dorcheſter has her dignity ſtill, and much beauty in her drooping lichened roofs and old inn yards; though day and night her slumber is broken by the honking cars and cycles that sweep round the wide curve of her ſtreet to Oxford and the weſt. In gathering darkness we ſtumbled into the old yard of 'The George' where faintly glimmered through the hint of leaves the crumbling baluſtrade of all that remains of the gallery, which in the days of coaches muſt have rung with pattering feet and guſts of laughter, and caſt its warm lamplight upon the cobbled ſtones below, on the ſteaming coats of the panting horses and the lumbering ſtable boys. A short and very round figure, surmounted by a cap and moſt suitable to the old interior, met us in the lamplit passage, and thereupon began our acquaintance with one of the heartieſt of landlords ever met in an old coaching house—William Jordan, in whose family 'The George' has been for over two hundred years. That explained

the atmosphere, the friendly warmth which breathed from every rafter, and which accompanied us up the steep winding stairs, and to the little pantry that was the bar, and down to the great kitchen with its high raftered roof and swinging hams and general clutter, a kitchen that Hogarth would have loved. Delightful it was at the end of that golden September day to take mine ease in such an inn, attended so sufficiently by the spirit of the past. Homage, therefore, to my merry landlord and his guid wife with her bright eyes, and to the little maid who worked so steadily to maintain and nourish that spirit, unconsciously, but admirably indeed. Here one forgot the mechanical age, the motor-car, the restlessness, the haste, existing not far beyond the oil-lamps of Dorchester. Here, in temporary escape from that necessarily-alert and progressive world beyond, nothing mattered but the moment.

Up in the long sitting-room where supper was half-prepared, the little maid dragged two great chairs to the log fire, and apologised for the possible delay of the meal, a common occurrence in this leisurely place where Time was of no account. A grandfather clock, larger than any I had seen, ticked solemnly in the far corner, and a huge sideboard was littered with rare china, old silver, worn but shining dish-covers, tattered magazines and gramophone-records in a careless clutter that was peculiarly fitting to the general comfort. Rembrandt's portrait of himself looked down solemnly beside a cheap oleograph, and I suspected the large, faded Mother and Child above the old cottage piano to be a reproduction of da Vinci. Photographs of cricket elevens kept company on the opposite wall with old prints of Dorchester Abbey, and a collection of fine, solid wheelback chairs waited to be drawn to the massive dining-table, where beneath the swinging lamps was laid for two the cold lamb and mint

sauce, the black currant tart, and the deeply-hollowed Stilton. The little maid spoke sadly of her cold, but with no complaint, as with no complaint she described the many duties of her day, which ranged from carrying early tea and hot water to the last washing-up an hour before midnight. Her soft voice suggested but the merest hint of resignation, certainly not of rebellion or dismay, as she spoke of her part in ' the rush at Easter,' and at Whitsun, and August Bank Holiday, of ' being worn off her feet on Sundays ' and their trials in the heavy winter snows. Was she not one of the family, and if the family worked hard must she not work hard too ? For all their affairs, in pleasure or misfortune, were hers also. Despite the story of those long hours in the hot kitchen and up and down the creaking stairs, it was impossible to be sorry for those blooming cheeks and the gentle voice that expressed so suitably her placid little soul.

There was not room for us to sleep in the inn, for the accommodation was limited at all times to five bedrooms only, and we were to stay instead somewhere within the long, low grocer's shop opposite, whose lichened roof, the loveliest and perhaps the oldest in Dorchester, was backed by the great grey Abbey. There was something of adventure in crossing the wide cobbled street in the sudden darkness, warm, drowsy, stiff and happy, beneath the frosty stars. As we fumbled for the right door of the shop, a voice shouted direction from the dim passage of the ' George,' and we turned to catch the suggestive picture of the starlit street, its shadows sharply defined, the one lamp fastened low to the wall of the inn, and the yard a deep blot of darkness. The quarters from the Abbey chimes dropped sonorously into the silence as I climbed into the high feather bed and blew out the candle.

Beautiful, tender roofs of Dorchester. . . . I did not see them until I had slipped reluctantly from that envelop-

ing, comfortable bed in the early sunny morning, leaving a bare quarter of an hour before breakfast. So that there was no time to sketch their enfolding lines and drooping beauty, and the golden boughs above the golden moss. The stone kitchen below was sweet with the cool airs of morning, that swept in unchecked from the wide garden where all the birds were singing madly. But Dorchester slept deeply still as we crossed the sunny street to the 'George' and breakfast.

A winding stream set thick with reeds and the spreading boughs of willows links up Dorchester with the Thames. It is the little Thame, and has the charm of all tributaries that twist through rich pastures and coppices. In the autumn, for all its flood of leaves, it must wear a heart-searching beauty, and I have not seen it later than July. On a hot summer noon there, instinctively one drops the oars or pulls very gently, lest one break the spell of those reaches of still water, where, half-drowsing, the eyes look up from the lilies to the overhanging, grey-green boughs so close above, with the cry of the poet at one's lips—the tramp-poet who sings as the bird sings—'. . . and let a tree Sigh with her bosom over me!'

From Oxford a high road climbs on to the Cotswolds, reaching slowly into a lonelier, bleaker country, that seems all the more austere to one but lately come from the warm, wooded hollows of the south. But in the summer the mustard flames in all the fields around, and makes bright patches on the hills. While the valleys drowse, this open highway knows a wind that wakens the senses and stirs the blood. Witney, of blanket fame, offered little of interest, but we dropped down the little lane of Minster Lovell to look for the legendary chest of the Mistletoe bough. Though easily seen from the hill, down in the hollow the ruin of the manor-house was not easy to find, for all was a tangle of overgrown paths and

wildness. Brambles hindered our feet, and the old trees had tumbled their branches to earth in storms of the past. Ivy straggled over the crumbling walls, and wild flowers grew among the fallen stones. It was a lonely uncared-for spot in the sunny peace of late afternoon, as we searched for one to tell us of the lovely lady who came to such sad end. The verger in the small church dispelled the pretty illusion, and told a somewhat less romantic story. Francis Lovell, thirteenth baron, as a loyal but defeated Yorkist returned after the battle of Stoke in 1487 to his old home, and sheltered in the cellars there under the attendance of a faithful serving man until the old man's death, after which event the neglected Lovell died of starvation. But there are few facts to support the tale.

The beautiful tombs of the Lovells are well preserved, but for the sad testimony of the indirect havoc of the Great War. Many Australians were in camp in the neighbourhood, and for want of better diversion or notoriety, carved or chipped their initials not only over the stony folds of the robes and the quiet hands, but also upon cheek and nose and chin. There is justifiable local anger upon the subject.

The sun was paling beneath clouds in the west and there was hint of rain as we hurried our steps westwards. At dusk we turned by a mustard field to descend the hill that comes to rest in the main street of one of the most beautiful villages in England—Burford, the decayed city of the wool-trade, built entirely of the grey Cotswold stone and rich in the cool dignity of the past.

Near midnight, from the casement of the 'Lamb,' I looked out across the grassy cobblestones to the still grey houses folded up in beauty, and then the other way to the road to Cirencester, glimmering faintly in starlight, with sweet-smelling fields beside. The road to the enchanted

West, Hereford, Caerleon, Usk, Wales. How silent it was, but for the whirr of the bats in the light streaming from the window, and the call of a distant, wakeful bird. Here was one of the holy places, beautiful and perfect; cut off from time and space. I stepped into it out of the world. It was a night, in such a spot, to make silent the heart and conform the thoughts to prayer, perhaps to God, perhaps to Pan, perhaps to the spirit of Beauty that walks still on quiet feet through forgotten places, in spoiled, mechanised England as in ancient Greece. Perhaps to all three, for their presence on the midnight air. . . .

But fuller description of Burford belongs to another chapter. . . . The contrast between the Cotswold villages and those of Berkshire is strong. Quite suddenly there are no longer russet roofs, barns, whitewashed walls and heavy beams, and heavily-creepered cottages of thatch clinging close to the earth and sheltering in orchards. The green hedges give place to those of piled grey flints, as in Cumberland, and the stone farms stand firm and square to the wind and rain. And yet there is kindness and repose in their simple contours, and certainly romance in the glimpses of Elizabethan manors hidden among the hills. The Windrush and the Evenlode, broken from Father Thames, run twisting by young willows and through grassy fields strewn thick with buttercups and daisies in midsummer, so that fair is the land in its simplicity. Lovable too, is the Cotswold stone, its quiet grey restful to the eyes and the senses, its lines in roof and wall and bridge revealing a harmony and dignity that the eye lingers over and the mind loves.

And so, through a placid, lonely country, we came to Kelmscott, down by the younger, narrower Thames, in a quiet corner forgotten by the world. It seemed a fitting spot for William Morris to have made his home, in the

heart of typical English country and close to the slim river. There are willows everywhere here, and the murmur of many streams, and an infinite quiet about the little old cross, plain and worn, which stands in the village centre.

Here, sleeping in the sun, were the mossed roofs again and the gardens full of flowers, that smelled sweetly with chrysanthemums and late roses as we passed them in our search for the poet's house. Again my shyness and fear of intrusion stayed my hand at the bell-pull by the door in the high wall, but the glimpse of the old gables through the trees and the peep at the great garden, rich in autumn prodigality, gave sufficient pleasure. Sleepless, by one of those high lattices, he may have murmured as he composed idly in the ghostly hour of summer dawn :

' Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,
Think but one thought of me up in the stars.
The summer night waneth, the morning light slips,
Faint and grey 'twixt the leaves of the aspen, betwixt the cloud-bars
That are patiently waiting there for the dawn ;
Patient and colourless, though Heaven's gold
Waits to float through them along with the sun. . . . '

Kelmscott, Kelmscott—a name I have loved since childhood. Softly and melodiously its cadences steal into that ring o' bells of place-names that fame has made immortal ; emblazoned in soft colours it crowns the life-story of the poet, teacher, designer and craftsman who exerted such lasting influence upon the productions of his period, and who sleeps now as he wished to sleep, beneath a quiet stone in the tangled churchyard. Kelmscott, Kelmscott—the name sits well upon this lost leafy place by the reedy stream. It is a picture in recollection like one of his own tapestries, where green branching arms embrace across the grey, and the sudden glinting

scarlet of opening bud and the purple of peacock's wing are like points of fire. It sways, a living thing, moved by that breath of pre-Raphaelite romance that derived from the Renaissance among the hills of Italy. The sunshine of memory lights again the silver water and the irises, the flashing wings of birds and the dragon flies among the reeds. It was this silver thread of river here that tangled the large schemes of the young Shelley, when with his wife Mary, Thomas Peacock and Charles Clairmont, he pulled up from Oxford to follow the Thames to the Severn canal, and thence to the western coast. It was typical of the wild young poet that he hoped to go on from there, with the aid of further canals and young rivers, to the Lakes in the north, and later the Tweed and Clyde, covering in all, upon return, a voyage of two thousand miles! But alas, very early the splendid plans came to grief among the reeds, which three miles above Lechlade 'became so enormously thick and high that three of us tugging could not move the boat an inch; the water also, a little farther on, was so shallow that it barely covered the hoofs of some cows standing in the middle to drink.' Philosophically and happily enough they passed the rest of the day at Lechlade, where Peacock persuaded Shelley to break his vegetarian habits in favour of 'peppered mutton-chops,' which with the sweet air of the river, helped to bring the ruddiness of health to the cheeks that ordinarily wore the pallor of girlhood.

It pleases me to think of him asleep upon the banks beneath a drooping tree, or scattering the flying beads of water from his poet's hands, as his eyes change from mood to mood with the thoughts, wilful, mocking, troubled, tender, or wise, that Francis Thomson said 'scorched through all the folds of expression.' Among the waterlilies and the green pools, would Mary have laughed or wept to hear the words of the later poet yet

unborn, who saw in the young Shelley ‘ the cloth of gold burst at the fixtures, and show the naked poetry ’ ? It would not matter in that warm languorous hour, when life was kind and beautiful and gay to the happy friends.

BY THE ORCHARD

At high midsummer
The nights are sweet . . .
At the lane's curve
By the apple orchard
We stayed our feet.

A quiet place
In the dusk it was.
Nothing was stirring . . .
The kine were shadows
There in the grass.

Among the gnarled branches
And the shadowy air
Of the apple orchard
(As we watched unaware)
Who wandered there?

Mary the Maiden
So young and so wise,
Or knight on white charger
Pacing slowly
With valorous eyes?

Among the gnarled branches
Of the sleeping glade,
Whose the white tapers
And the sheathèd blade
On the altar laid?

Burning invisible
On mortal eyes
(Beyond all forgetting)
The Seal of the Chosen,
The Seal of Emprise. . . .

Whence the fair fragment
Of the enchanted tale ?
From lowly Stable
From Gabriel,
Or the lifted Grail ?

The kine were kneeling
There in the grass. . . .
The holiest moment
Of all life's moments
On earth it was.

Dear God ! That my fingers
Or lips could trace
But once of the wonder
That wrapped us in glory
In that sweet place.

CHAPTER III

IN THE COTSWOLDS

I USED to wish to live within one of your quiet grey houses, my beautiful and beloved town in the green cup at the gate of the Cotswolds, that the tenor of my life might take on something of your graciousness and repose. But I think perhaps it is better to know you not too well, lest familiarity blunt the sharp delight that is mine every time I descend the slope of hill that leads into your peace. There is no place I know that is quite like you, no village for me of more subtle enchantment or more difficult to define. For you are kind with a depth and largeness that few men and women possess, and yet you are aloof too, ready to receive, but never seeking. The passion of beauty is yours also, but so restrained it is that others think you cold. Though I may be contradicted, I consider there is no place in England that has your dignity, your simplicity, your harmony and slumbrous content. In the words of William Hunter, here might 'tired life be content to lay down its burden and enter into its rest. Peace, haunted by romance, dwells here in reverie, and everywhere are equal images of rest—of a rest in which there is nothing supine or sluggish, no element of death or decay, but in which passion, imagination, beauty, and sorrow seized at their topmost poise, seem crystallised in an eternal calm.' There are not those scars upon your outskirts that defile other beautiful towns, like Rye and Oxford, and many others, for you are fortunate in the protection of those who care for you. To be with you is more than satisfaction and delight, for not only have

you kept alive all that was most beautiful in your past, but you are for me the living expression of that Ideal which men strive for endlessly through darkness and struggle. Your graciousness is of the Kingdom of Heaven, and because of that I am as a happy lover upon your steep cobbled stones, a lover who needs to wander no more, since he possesses the beloved.

It is said that in Burford are to be found within a short radius, more old historic houses than in almost any other village in England. One feels the truth of that statement immediately upon descending the wide cobbled street, with its fringe of trees framing the old roofs of Cotswold stone, and the tall spire of the famous church which peers so curiously from the valley that it can be seen for miles around on the surrounding hills. The main street is so wide that the houses are dwarfed, and it is this spaciousness upon the hillside that gives the approach to Burford much of its beauty. In its two streets there is only the storied stone to-day to tell of the prosperity of the wool trade that covered three centuries. Here and there is an old pointed doorway which is a relic of the days of wattle and daub, for before the fifteenth century stone was only employed for the lower stories of the little cluster of houses around the river, which comprised the Burford of those days. Beneath these stone arches passed the pack horses and the bales to the workshops and sheds beyond, while on either side and above were the living rooms of separate burgher's houses. As the town grew, cottages were built behind these large houses, and the timber of the upper stories demolished to be replaced by that of enduring stone. One guesses that many of the simple cottage walls hide beauties of domestic architecture within that Time has not yet worn away. The market in the fourteenth century must have been a colourful picture, for in it was sold everything

necessary to man—live stock of all kinds, hides and fleeces and skins, meat, fish, oil and cheese, woven stuffs and embroidery, precious ointment, goods of iron and copper, and fuel for the household fires. By the sixteenth century the town was at the height of its prosperity, for the quarries were supplying stone to replace the decaying timber, masons were hurrying with the reconstruction of the church, and houses began to appear upon the hillsides. During the century, too, Queen Elizabeth passed through, and was pleased by the look of the tidy houses with their green closes in the quiet Cotswold hollow. Much of the town's vitality at this time can be traced to one Simon Wisdom, whose appropriate and delightful name appears many times in the old records as burgher, collector and alderman, and part-founder of the Grammar School. Burford at this date was a place of public penance, and it must have been a common sight to see, at certain periods, the prisoner standing for his alloted time upon the top step of the cross with a faggot of wood upon his shoulder, or kneeling with it before the church altar at Mass. The town received a royal visit again in 1644, for Charles I stayed at the 'George' upon his march to Oxford, and stayed a day to attend church service. One hardly notices the inns to-day, for a casual glance will discover not more than four or five, but in the seventeenth century there were thirteen, though where they stood I have not been able to discover. In 1761 the first coach was run by a Burford man from there through Witney to London, and thus encouraged greater traffic from the west. It left by way of Sheep Street and Witney Street, for then the present main road on the hilltop was but a farm track. But in 1812, when the track became the road, all traffic passed along it to Cheltenham, Gloucester, Hereford and Wales, and passengers for Burford were obliged to descend at the cross-roads and walk down the

hill with their luggage. From that time does the gradually-deepening peace of Burford date, for to-day the railway runs several miles away, and the coaches that pass through the village are but two or three a day. Burford's church, as every lover of English churches should know, is a fitting seal upon the village's dignity and charm. The massive tombs in the churchyard will draw the visitor's notice, but he may not know that in the seventeenth century they served as hiding places for the poacher's plunder from the adjacent Wychwood, which was part of the vast open forest land of 3000 acres. I am indebted to Mrs. Sturge Gretton's admirable little book on *Burford Past and Present* for these interesting facts.

Some years ago Compton Mackenzie occupied one of Burford's loveliest houses, 'Ladyham,' which was the setting for his delightful novel, *Guy and Pauline*; and the family of the late Mr. C. E. Montague, whose work reflects the best of the English tradition, occupy the old house, 'Kit's Quarries,' still. Indeed, there are few beautiful houses there that are not occupied by those most anxious to enjoy and preserve her gracious atmosphere. By the churchyard is a path to the rickety old bridge over the Windrush, and in the early dusk, at the season of the mayfly, you will meet the anglers returning from the day's sport, laden with the trout, roach and grayling that the brook has yielded. It is pleasant on May mornings to sit in the fields there, in the long grass by the river, among tall dog daisies, and clover smelling sweetly in the sun, to drowse to the sound of the bees, and watch the flight of swallows about the lovely grey spire; to attend that excited dance over the water of the million gossamer wings of the may-fly, that live so intensely for but one day of life, circling, trembling, shimmering ceaselessly above the leaping fish. Good it is to walk slowly through the buttercups by the grey field

walls, while unsought the lyrics of Herrick and the sonnets of Shakespeare drift across the mind, suggested by the calm English landscape beneath the smiling sky.

If there is a more comfortable inn in Burford than the ' Lamb ' I have yet to discover it. It stands with modest sign and long low front, geranium-bright, next door to the old Priory at the end of cobbled Sheep Street, with its tall trees and garden closes, which is the romantic road to Cirencester, Northleach and the west. It is good at the end of a summer day to cross the old stone flags of the ' Lamb,' to the cool dimness of the lounge with its great fireplace, and the kitchen where the hams swing and the huge settle keeps off the blaze of the fire. Good from the window seats in the little old bedrooms above, to watch the dusk pace gently down the cobbled street, or the dawn wake chill and grey. You will meet few guests but anglers, who generally are charming folk. I remember one bore only, a degenerate disciple of Walton who talked hour by hour of nothing but ballroom dancing in all its aspects and details. He stands out in memory because he was unique. But there is good welcome always there. The atmosphere itself will receive you as you lift the latch to meet the colour and comfort of its well-ordered simplicity, and the visitor's book with its well-known names will testify to the pleasure others have received.

It was September when we stayed in that pleasant inn to begin a walk northwards through the Cotswolds to Stratford-on-Avon and Banbury. But already it was like the early winter in Burford, for a cold wind met us as we dropped from the Oxford bus (preferring to walk down the hill and taste the flavour slowly), a wind that nevertheless could not chill the familiar thrill of delight that possessed me at the sight of her remembered beauty. The hot scones and the blazing fire, and later the tub and

the good simple dinner, were very welcome upon the bleak afternoon that held so little promise for the coming week.

It was warmer as we left at morning, climbing with heavy packs but adventurous hearts the ten miles to Stow-on-the-Wold, obeying at last that suggestive old signpost at the cross roads. I had longed to follow it so many times, that I might know upon what bare hill stands that village where for ever 'the wind blows cold.' I do not know why the call of the height is always more urgent than the call of the vale, unless it is that man's spirit goes naturally that way, and where the spirit leads the body would follow. . . . At the top of the hill, by another mustard field, a yellow caravan like a great clumsy butterfly was trundling on ahead. There was satisfaction in the sight of that caravan, with its tired, placid horse; it was the only moving thing in the solitude, and went slowly by the low grey wall and the yellow field, as though Nature the artist had sought and found the one right touch to complete the Cotswold picture. It suggested the beginnings of a romantic ballad. How should it go? Something like this?

> Through the hills she drove all day;
> Hour by hour she met no man
> To note her tears or bid her stay,
> Or hail her yellow caravan. . . .

At Rissington, high and lonely, we searched for the inn that might provide the early cup of tea that climbing made imperative, but could find none. We knocked at a cottage door, and were received straightway with that mingled dignity and servitude that is typical of cottage hospitality, and has in it the essence of courtesy. The fresh butter was brought from the larder and a new loaf cut for us, and the children's dinner pushed far up the table that we might the better enjoy what comfort they

THE COTSWOLD COUNTRY.

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had to offer. The children stared shyly with wide-eyed curiosity, and the man of the house proffered awkward questions in his attempt at unfamiliar conversation. It was difficult to make them accept our shilling for that satisfying if simple meal, and it was with sincere and less-awkward godspeeds that we were directed on our way. The sun came out as we dropped down to Bourton-on-the-Water, that neat, bright little village where the ducks sail like toys down the Windrush, here a sophisticated baby stream with grassy banks, and small curved bridges that link the cottages to the road of sleepy shops. All the roads that lead to Stow are climbing roads, and ours in the tired evening seemed not the shortest or the kindest. But consolation there was in the fringe of beeches, thick and leafy and deeply-green for all the hastening autumn, that lined our way for several miles up the hill. Pleasantly here ran the grey walls down the open hillsides, in flowing lines that gave design to the pastures. The distance was veiled in mist, and the sheep were almost lost in it. By that way lay to-morrow's road, on the other side of the mist. . . . Stow-on-the-Wold is very much like its name, high, grey, windy and quiet, with a suggestion of bleakness and affront that yet is bracing and stimulating if not lovable. No town can be all things at once, and Stow is an austere thought to the mind when the body is imprisoned in a languid valley. The church tower, on an eminence of 800 feet, is a landmark for ten miles. Through its dipping old streets there is the sudden gleam of green fields beyond in the valleys, of peering trees round the angles of grey walls, and inn signs restless in the wind. Its old posting houses suggest a busy past, and its wide spaces, where there seem so few to walk now, a larger population than Stow has to-day. Indeed, Stow Fair, in the old prosperous days of the woollen trade, is said to have been the

most famous in England. In one charming corner of the square, giant elms lean above the old stocks in the grass, upon a background of small, demure houses reminiscent of Jane Austen. A solid Georgian house near the church tower seemed to promise the cheapest and most satisfactory lodging for the night, and discreetly we knocked. A somewhat prim, grey-haired and ageing spinster (one is never mistaken in the look of spinsters) opened the door and eyed us shrewdly. But there was the suspicion of a twinkle in her eyes which was hopeful and comforting as we stood upon the step. Yes. We could have a room. But we mustn't mind a bit of muddle, or expect any fuss, and she'd be glad if we would be as quiet as we could! When inside the door, we learned that her father, who must have been at least ninety, since she herself was the youngest of three daughters, was once more on the verge of passing from this world. But since this had happened seven or eight times within the past year or two, and the doctor could find very little wrong with him, no one took the illness very seriously. The facts explained the twinkle, and we twinkled likewise in sympathy. But 'he caused a lot of work,' and 'she was always busy enough as it was, with her regular gentlemen,' and 'so we mustn't mind taking pot luck.' We assured her we didn't, and made ourselves comfortable enough in worn old armchairs in the large sitting room, savouring in pleasant anticipation the smell of frying steaks and chips, and as we waited, following the example of the 'regular gentlemen' who were writing steadily and scratchily in various parts of the room. In the cool and cloudy morning, we learned that the old man had not yet died, but was clamouring testily at that moment for his bread and milk. I should like to know if he lives still, and the number of last illnesses his daughter has nursed since; or if he is dead

at last, and the manner of his passing. Certainly it was good, in that shabby, comfortable house, to meet the good humour and amused patience that does not always accompany the prolonged nursing of the querulous aged. I hope that her patience is rewarded at last, and those tired eyes have other and heartier matters to twinkle upon.

It was so stuffy all that cloudy day, and the senses were so drowsy, that I have forgotten almost all that country that lies round Bourton-on-the-Hill and Moreton-in-the Marsh, where we fought steadily against the warm, labouring wind, up the dusty lanes and by the twisting walls. The mind does not recall easily what was never vividly impressed, and the day passed stolidly, broken only by the pictures of fat Cotswold sheep filling the elm-shaded lane, the touch of September upon the oaks, the grey ribbons of the stone hedges across the mustard, and the winding green road that was like a mocking will o' the wisp dancing on before, all the way to Chipping Camden. Summer evening in Chipping Camden—Indian summer—and the late golden light gliding over the grey Tudor house fronts with their noble doorways, high gables and swinging lattices; the yellow autumn leaves piled in drifts by the cobble stones. Beautiful, dignified Chipping Camden, fragrant with age.... After tea, and the booking of a room at 'The Volunteer' at the end of the long quiet street, we sat to rest on the seat round the great walnut tree. The golden leaves fell slowly through the lambent air, and the long street, almost like a square in its width, was very quiet. Chipping Camden was lovely in that drowsy hour, her grey and russet roofs faintly glowing above the stone, and here and there the grass blades green before her little shop fronts. Many call it the most beautiful town in England; certainly it is one of the most interesting, for apart from the flourishing wool trade of the past, which was responsible for the

building of these beautiful seventeenth century houses and the church the pious and wealthy merchants raised, it knows to-day a vital revival of Guild life and craftsmanship, which seeks to build its small defences against the power of the Mechanical Age. Here for about twenty years has laboured that small group, drawn originally from London and reinforced by local support, among whom are potters, iron workers, jewellers, glaziers, sculptors, weavers, bookbinders, etc., fashioning slowly their simple and enduring pieces in this remote Cotswold hollow, and enriching England, who is sadly content with the shoddy and the standardised, with a few lasting things of beauty and distinction. Though lacking for me a little of that harmonious completeness which is the distinction of Burford, Chipping Camden was perhaps at its best upon that soft September evening. We wandered up and down the quiet street and noted the details of door and mullion, of chimney and glimpsed interior; and sat through the last moments of the sunlight under the walnut, letting the golden quiet flow into the mind. Then, as if by design rather than by chance, that the moment might be immortalised in memory, three nuns came slowly over the cobbles, their full black skirts sweeping and rustling, and their stiff muslin coifs transparent in the sun, their faces lit by that clear serenity which distinguishes the sisterhood. The yellow leaves drifted above them as they came into the flecked shadow cast by the tree, and passed on by the tall grey houses. A streak of sunset sky still lingered above a gable, the air in the shadowed places grew darker, and a black branch stirred in soft silhouette against the vermilion of a sudden-lighted lattice. Cameo of September eve. . . . Finis upon the hour. . . . A peal of bells rang upon the silence and we went back to the inn.

Does that gay sign of the upstanding soldier in red

tunic, white breeches and black gaiters, the uniform of 1808, still swing from the quieter end of the long street of Camden? The landlady was proud to tell us how a certain famous journalist, a wandering fellow with an interest in such things, was displeased with 'the disfiguring daub' he found there, and considered it most unsuitable to her comfortable inn. Hence, he spent an enthusiastic winter in searching old books for the facts to enable him to paint a new one, which he successfully achieved upon sound poplar wood, and which her husband, a joiner, fixed to a suitable and worthy frame. A little faded now beneath the varnish, it looked down upon us with an air of jaunty bravado as she proudly exhibited it and we talked. By the sitting room fire upstairs sat a young girl in a blue wrapper, with a cloud of golden hair framing a soft childish face that was but faintly American. On a hassock at her feet, the lean brown hands clasping his knees, sat her husband, with fresh candid face and boyish manner that spoke of recent college life. They spoke of the delightful Saxon (!) houses of Camden, of the 'First Flighters' (a term new to me, signifying the moderns in literature), and enquired where they might add in the neighbourhood to the collection of china and carpets they were taking back with them to America. The landlady, pleasant and rustling in her ample black silk gown, came in with preparations for their supper, and we discussed the barnstormers who were appearing that night at the local hall, whom she described as 'a most respectable company!' We gathered that she regarded all theatrical companies with the suspicion of the countrywoman.

Indeed, there was fun that night in the hall that has accommodation for about a hundred and fifty people, where the bills announced 'for that night only' a lusty drama of the delicious title of *Death before Dishonour*!

We paid our sixpences, and chose our seats (hard kitchen chairs, all of them) carefully at the back, where our possibly-ribald laughter might not disturb the rest of the audience, some of whom, no doubt, would take it all very seriously. We watched them file in, ploughboys and farm lasses, shop assistants, shepherds, children, and near the time of starting, the plump and stolid elders in their best clothes. Already the atmosphere was intimate as Charlie called loudly to Bill, and Mrs. Blank greeted Mrs. Dash across several intervening rows, and Farmer Giles threw advice about the turnips over many heads to Farmer Brown. In the box-office the leading lady, highly-painted for her part, smiled benignly upon the crowd as she took the shillings and sixpences. The children forgot their frolics to stare with awe and wonder at the deep-dyed villain, who, in top boots, clanking spurs, and terrible eyebrows and whiskers, wandered up and down directing folk to their seats, with as amiable a manner as his costume would allow. At length the cracked piano beneath the stage broke jovially into the familiar air, 'A Life on the Ocean Wave,' and many heavy feet, anxious for activity and some expression for their excitement, stamped cheerful accompaniment. The 'attendants' disappeared; someone turned down the oil lamps on the walls, and the curtain rose without hitch. The action promised to be somewhat hampered and difficult upon the narrow platform of nine or ten feet wide, illuminated by a single oil lamp. I have forgotten the deviations and subtleties of that bloodthirsty tale, except that at many points the heroine declared with unmistakable emphasis her preference for death before dishonour. I vaguely remember the hero declaiming so too, when almost cornered by the villain, to the accompaniment of wild hisses from the audience that were speedily followed by cheers and much stamping of feet,

as he mouthed the brave phrase. He was a sailor boy of the good old English breed, and the wicked count had abducted his sweetheart, luring her by lies and honeyed words to his remote mansion upon the sea-coast (somewhat Victorian in character). There was also a sweet che-ild, suitably lame, with golden curls above his (or her) sailor suit, which he (or she) wore in emulation of the brave sailor boy. The heroine, plump and ageing, in a pink wrapper that also served as opera cloak, was cast down upon the decrepit sofa, while the count towered above, his eyes flashing with triumph beneath those terrible brows, his spurs rattling as he marched up and down the narrow stage. The little che-ild begged in clear if tearful accents for his sister's safety, and clung piteously to those booted calves, but was flung with a contemptuous growl into the farthest corner, where of course he lay stunned. Then—O cheers! at the last, critical moment when it was almost too late, who should smash his bull-dog way through the French windows (of paper) but the brave sailor lad, escaped that night from prison, where he had been wrongfully detained upon a false conviction arranged by the villain himself? The bravos were deafening, but not sufficiently so in our immediate vicinity to cover our uncontrollable giggles. The ploughboys and their girls in front turned almost in a body and glared. We composed our faces for the next act. For troubles were not yet at an end—by any means. Was not the hero still a prisoner and must he not return to gaol until his innocence be proved? I have forgotten how that was managed, but remember the pathos of the final curtain, when the little lame che-ild received in his breast the shot intended for the hero, fired by the villain (and of course criminal) the moment before he was shackled and led off to prison. As the sailor boy and his sweetheart, united at last, bent above the slight figure

ſtretched out upon the boards, ſtroking the golden curls amidſt their tears, the laſt words rang out clearly from the throat of the dying across the breathless hall :

'It does not matter! Do not weep! I prefer'— (a sob) 'death before dishonour!'

Poor buffoons, brave buffoons. I was ashamed of my laughter as we came out beneath the froſty ſtars, ranked in their calm millions above sleeping Chipping Camden. The inn was in darkness, but on the table two tall candles ſtood ready for lighting ; they caſt upon the surrounding shadow a circle of rich and golden light, upon the jug of cider, the blue plates, the cheese, the lettuce, and the brown bread and butter on the yellow platter. I cannot explain it, but there was something of sacrament about that spread meal. Perhaps my thoughts were not only of buffoons, but of that poor jongleur who danced and capered before the altar of Our Lady because he had no other gift to bring. . . . Certainly with gravity that was not yet sadness we broke bread and drank the cider, toaſting half-humorously the arching ſtars.

Through indifferent country that I have forgotten and in the warm and tiring valley airs, a few mornings later we followed the caravans, the roundabouts and sideshows, that lumbered, bright spots of colour in the lanes, to Stratford for the Mop Fair. Thus might Shakespeare himself have wandered with his vagabond train, singing and ambling leisurely through the countryside on the long summer days, in his green and callow youth before he came to court, to the favours of the queen and immortal glory. As we sat by the duſty roadside to reſt, close to the quiet meadows and the thatched black and white cottages that are characteriſtic of Warwickshire, the blue and yellow vans passed at intervals, with the children and the dark-browed women cluſtering on the ſteps, and the gipsy pulling at his short clay as he led the

patient beasts. Thus we saw that serene and historic city given over to mirth and jest for a night and a day. Already in the late afternoon the streets were packed with vehicles, since apparently there was no suitable space outside where they might gather for this important annual event, which dated from the days when servants of all kinds went round with the stalls and the sideshows, and ranged themselves for hire with implement or symbol indicating their trade. Thus the shepherd wore a twist of wool in his coat, and the servant girl a white bow, though in these days when domestic service is fallen into disfavour, the white bow is seldom seen. There was now great difficulty in finding lodging for the night, and we had to push our way through the curious crowd, that wandered up and down inspecting the fixing of the waggons and the stalls, and the great roundabout that was the centre of attraction. Eventually a room was discovered in one of the narrower streets, a little room whose one window looked out upon the preparations for one of the great ox-roasts, to take place upon the morrow. We looked down upon the piling of the bricks for the oven, and the fixing of the pole which should suspend the carcase, upon the laying of the fire and the interest of the small boys. In the butchers' shops the sacrificial animals held the place of honour; there were fat pigs with tied trotters and garlands round their fair round bellies, and noble bullocks trussed for the pole and trimmed with laurel. Before dark the roundabouts and the swings were going well, and the first pennies exchanged for the cocoanut shies. There was excitement in the sight of the flaring naphthas and the din of the hurdy-gurdy, as we mingled among the surging crowd in the famous old town. The cold ghost of the poet might have warmed himself by the braziers, and his blood have leapt again to the throb of an old tune, as he stole back beneath the familiar

gables where he was born and bred, to watch men and women making merry as of old, with ribald jeſt and gamble. We longed to join the shop girls and their boys and mount the prancing horses of the roundabout, to be carried round with ever-increasing swiftness above the smiling, gaping crowd ; to clamber into a swing and rock athwart the ſtars, but as sensitive ſtomachs forbade both those innocent joys, we were content to wander among the kaleidoscope of colour and to savour the din and smells inseparable from Fairs. Soon after eleven the flares were extinguished and the noise gradually died, and as the laſt group ſtraggled conversationally home, Stratford settled itself for sleep. At four we awoke to the sound of crackling twigs, and with drowsy eyes of surprise looked upon the dull crimson square of the window, which denoted the lighting of the fire beneath. But alas, by breakfaſt time there was rain upon all the spluttering fires, rain which continued hour by hour but could not quench them, though quickly it damped the spirits of would-be revellers. Surely after the battle between fire and water the spluttering joints would be less succulent for those privileged to taſte. We assumed that the poor would receive many cuts of beef and lamb that day, but were disappointed to discover that the meat was sold, prosaically, to the hotels inſtead. In the perſiſtent heavy rain, our flights about Stratford, seeing all there was to be seen, were swift and awkward. It was satisfying to notice that the city pleasantly blended her modern prosperous life with the rich appeal of the paſt, without vulgar ſtress upon either, so that her character was full and rounded and complete ; satisfying to receive that expected spiritual refreshment from contact with her English dignity and venerable antiquity, which seemed not yet spoiled by the ugly spirit of advertisement that defiles so many of our show places. Through the silver

mist of the rain we looked across the fair lawns by the Avon, and scaled the stairs of the Memorial Theatre, which comprised as well library, museum and picture gallery, and which suffered such unfortunate destruction by fire a year or so ago. The slow blood which the rain had chilled warmed a little as we gazed upon the relics that the poet had touched, as we knelt before the simple tomb, and stood in the little room where he was born. It was good to be in Stratford. Good to be conscious of one's English blood, which responded so readily and proudly to the rhythm of this quiet English spirit, a spirit that nourished, stimulated and sustained, the spirit of English earth and hardy English temperament, of wind and rain and centuries of sane and quiet living. . . .

Other days I remember among the quiet Cotswolds, whose softly-painted pictures will never fade. . . . The slopes of Bredon beneath a torn coverlet of snow, and the little trees and long grasses that are beloved by lovers in high midsummer, stiff and dumb with frost, and the deep hollows bleak with cold shadow. The rim of the smouldering sun over the hill shoulders ; the stone manor empty, and the lily pond frozen before the terrace and the peacocks flown with their colour and their cry. The cattle in the late afternoon waiting patiently, deep in the iron-bound mud by the farm gates ; the dainty, twisting paths shining with the rime, and suggesting now but faintly that sweetness and languishing beauty that summer brings to Bredon. The small chirp of the robin in the solitude, the sting of the cold in the finger tips ; the prick of the village steeple in the valley through the purple air. . . .

The road that runs twisting through the hills, impetuous and capricious as April, past many a lovely Cotswold farm and inviting to many a lovely view, from North-leach west to Birdlip. The scene from that famous

height as one gazes down, across vaſt broken slopes as across a bowl, of verdant plain and woods and meadows and ſtreams, and Glouceſter with all her towers and spires, shining there in the miſted sunlight like the city of God.

Painswick on a blue April morning, the pink apple blossom tossing across the old wall before the church spire, and the pointed roofs making a mediaeval picture. The famous clipped yews in the churchyard dark in high relief againſt the azure sky, and the children running to school through those ſteep grey byeways and green lanes and crooked little squares that are Painswick's charm. The winding ſtream in the valley with its old disused cloth mills, that one looks down upon as one climbs the solitary road up the valley to Sheepscombe, and up over the wooded hill to Miserden and Edgeworth. The light-hearted luſtiness with which we sang that clear bright morning a few ſtaves of an old Painswick song :

> O Painswick is a healthful town,
> It hath a bracing breeze,
> Where men by Nature's smile might live
> As long as e'er they please.
>
> Before the glass and baneful pipe
> Had robbed man of his ſtrength,
> And water only was his drink,
> He lived a greater length. . . .

and many more verses too numerous to recount here. The pleasure that we had in all those villages for their beauty and the charm of the women's voices, slow, peace-beſtowing voices that gave balm to the mind. . . . Upon the green hillsides as one goes on to Sapperton there are in early spring banks of primroses larger than any I have seen in Devon, which is more famous for them, and spreading fields of cowslips and a white floor of anemones big as pennies in the climbing woods. Sapperton has more than a suggeſtion of the wild about it, with

its low, overgrown, disused tunnel which burrows right under the hill on which the village is built, and which formed part of the Severn Canal in the days when conveyance by barge was more practical and commercial than it is to-day. Rubbish and a tangle of weeds now almost block the narrow entrance, while beside it, at certain hours of the day, the chimney shrieks its sudden call from the brick works, which strangely enough, do not deface but rather add to the careless, abandoned charm of the scene. An old bridge crosses the narrow stream, and close by stands the white-washed inn in the chequered shadow of orchard trees, where many tortoise-shell kittens play about the stranger's feet as he sits with his cider upon the low orchard wall. The hills make great sport in Sapperton and have shaken their flanks in a large laughter. It is a steep and twisting climb up by the tangle of trees to the rest of the village, which sits cleanly and comfortably in the midst of its breezy common on the height, under a great space of sky where the wind must never cease blowing. When Sapperton is left behind there is a sigh in the heart for its dark, untidy beauty down in the cleft of hill; one remembers it as a haunting face, a gipsy face, sometimes sullen, sometimes gay, but always untamed. Past open meadows scoured and harried by the wind that day we came to Cherrington, where 'folks come a-times to look at lily-pond,' but for little else. In the sedate sleeping village there seemed little hope of tea, for there was no inn that we could discover and the post-mistress had a washing day 'and could not be bothered.' We knocked at cottage doors; the fire was out in one and there was no answer from another, but at length a tall old peasant woman offered 'to kindle her sticks at once if we wouldn't mind to wait a bit.' But we had no time to wait, and politely declined her offer of a rest for twenty minutes while she 'got the

fire goin'.' But wouldn't we 'please come in, and maybe after all there was a cup in the pot,' though she couldn't be sure? She implored us with eyes that were terribly anxious to please, as she begged the lady to come in out of the wind. So we dumped our knapsacks on her bright linoleum, as she dusted two chairs with her apron and peered into the teapot on the hob. Wasn't it lucky now? There was just enough for two cups, and we'd like some bread and butter, now, wouldn't we? The small deal table was cluttered with the remains of Irish stew, and the fire had burned to ash in the old-fashioned grate. Pots of ferns brightened the tiny casement, and many family photographs on the wall tried in vain to hide the wallpaper that had peeled with age. Our eyes were drawn to four medals displayed in a plush frame over the mantelpiece, and in the midst of her flustered cutting of bread she noticed our gaze.

'Them was my sons. Three of them I lost in the War. And all good boys, too. But God was good and left me one.'

There was acquiescence in her old eyes and the blind, unquestioning trust of the peasant woman in her voice as she continued:

'So I didn't ought to grumble, did I? Some folk lost all they 'ad. . . . Now are you sure the tea's alright. Wasn't it lucky I 'ad two hin the pot now? Won't ee 'ave another slice, Miss?'

We declined more tea and enquired after the remaining son.

'Why, 'e's up at Mr. Crockett's farm. Carter 'e's been this four year, and a fine worker too, Mr. Crockett says. . . . They be ploughin' to-day up in the field.'

We remembered the patient horses across the furrows and the ploughmen, as we had come down the hill in

the wind, and mentioned the fact to her. Her eyes lit up at once with sharp delight and pride.

'Did ee see 'im then? Well, I never now. A shortish chap. . . . Such a good boy. Yes, Sir, me 'usband died many years ago. I *am* glad you saw 'im. . . . Why, I don't know, Sir, I'm sure. Just a trifle. Whatever you think best. You ain't 'ad much . . . but I'm so glad I 'ad it in the pot. There's nothin' like a cup o' tea. O *thank* you, Sir.'

She was excited as a child over the silver shilling, and her old hand trembled as she opened the door upon the sunny, dusty noon. It seemed that her simple heart spoke in her voice as she wished us a good journey to Tetbury, which compensated a little for her bad tea that had refreshed us not at all.

Are there happy folk in that hard, angular town of Tetbury on the borders of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire? For it has the appeal and characteristics of neither county. Its streets run hard and straight with no gentleness and mellowness of age, its small shops exhibit shoddy goods indifferently and disinterestedly for custom, and its citizens are gauche and apparently too well content with an atmosphere so barren of beauty and grace. I cannot remember seeing many trees in Tetbury, just as I do not remember any signs of industrialism. The town is characterless, like a spinster who has spent her life in a dark house, shut out from the sun and rain and the fulness of life. In a grey and none-too-clean hotel we sat over a gas fire and consumed more tea, while fast through the thin April sunshine fell the snow showers that made bleak little Tetbury dreary indeed. One moment there was of beauty—beneath the mounting golden clouds of sunset that rode over the spacious green square, which has the best of Tetbury's architecture in dignified white houses suggestive of Cranford, and which

redeems a little the prevailing ugliness of the rest of the town.

In the early starlight we came to old and beautiful little Malmesbury, and saw the shell of the noble abbey framing the jewelled sky. With majesty and commanding repose its arches seemed to lean upon the night, and watch the busy, ant-like life of the little town that played about its feet. For Malmesbury Minster is an integral part of the city's life, suggesting the long intimacy of a mother. The butter cross in the quadrangle before it held deep caves of shadow, and all the youth of the village passed up and down its one important street seeking the evening's amusement. But in Malmesbury there was no room for us, either at the 'King's Arms' with its bright flowerboxes and attractive old lamplit yard, nor at the dignified Georgian 'Bell,' monastic, forbidding and austere. All the inns and restaurants were soon discovered to be full. It grew dark as, following the recommendations of various sympathetic but over-burdened landladies, we stumbled into small shops and knocked at villas in search of rooms. The great abbey arches grew blacker and more lovely against the stars, and the space about the cross quiet with the peace of night. The lights in the steep winding streets below were extinguished, and Malmesbury prepared itself for bed. As we still marched about carrying our heavy bags, the frost of an April night descended and the air grew clear and cold. Though now faced seriously with the prospect of a night upon the road, still we were amused by the piquancy of the situation. At last the need for rest and warmth grew urgent, and through dark streets that were little more than lanes we sought the assistance of the police. They were interested and deeply sympathetic, and offered many suggestions, but could give little practical help beyond a few more addresses. The

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last train had gone, the last bus, and even the railway waiting room was closed for the night. Tetbury, which we had no desire to see again, was the nearest town and ten miles away. We had no money for a hired car, even if one had been obtainable. Very conscious now of the effect of the twenty miles tramp behind us, and the frosty air upon tired limbs, we considered the situation to be a little less piquant than it had been. Malmesbury now slept, and left her adventurers to enjoy the penalties of vagabondage. But there are many worse things than a bed upon mother earth, though the night is white with frost and fatigue acute. There remained one more possibility in Mrs. Pacey, who lived upon the Tetbury road across the allotments, and whose light was pointed out vaguely to us across the distant fields. In the unaccustomed darkness we stumbled to the wrong house, where a kind and concerned old woman directed us with wavering candle to the right path through the cabbages, lamenting that she had nought but a chair to offer us herself, but which should be ours for the asking if we needed to return. Beneath a pergola and through a kitchen garden we groped towards the kindly light, knocked over a bath at the kitchen door, and trusted the noise and the disturbance would not interfere with our chance of rest and refuge. The door was opened at once to our timid knock, and she who was Mrs. Pacey and the mistress of our fate, stared with some alarm in the candlelight as we explained our situation and apologised for intrusion at such an hour. She looked a little stern, but then that was to be expected. As we waited in the small scullery, she retired to discuss earnestly with someone within, and with great relief we learned that she had one bed, ' though the gentleman must sleep on a sofa in the kitchen,' and would we come into the fire ? Out of the dark night we then became part of a very mixed company.

For beside his typewriter and the coffee-pot sat a journalist from the county paper, who knew China and the Straits intimately and was more or less of a world traveller. Mine host had been engine driver upon the South African veldt for twenty years, and had returned only recently with his wife to take up the threads of life again upon her native soil. With her English reserve gradually melting under the influences of her warm English heart, she sat now, a shrewd and placid countrywoman, at the head of the table serving fresh tea to the strangers. One of them was a well-known writer, as well as land and sea-rover, arrived not so long ago from the South Seas, and an authority upon all matters connected with the Islands. The other was—but she does not count very much, except perhaps as a grey note of sophistication in this small colourful company. We helped to air sheets as the kettle sang on the hob for the hot water bottle; and the talk drifted from China and Africa to life on the veldt, to the folk of Malmesbury, and countless other things. Very comforting was the big fire to the relaxed limbs, and the kettle's song to the mind at rest, and deep and billowy the feather bed in the spotless room above, that was gay with chintz and pleasant with comfort. Very early I saw the sun shining brightly across the flat Wiltshire meadows, and the elms tossing against the radiant sky. Blessings upon you, Mrs. Pacey, and may many grateful guests be yours, who without undue suspicion and with no curiosity, but with welcome and hospitality and the smallest of bills, received the strangers who appeared like burglars at least at your back door in the sinister hours of night.

IDYLL

In the high beechwood
All life was dancing
In gold-dusted air . . .
The leaves and the grasses
Together were chanting
The song of midsummer
As we entered there
So unaware.

Under the ripple
Of sun-dappled leaf sprays
Above our bright eyes,
We lay and long-listened
Until we were merged in
The song of midsummer,
And so were made wise
Of the joy that flies.

O sweet the escape then
There in the sunlight
From mortality !
Was it Pan the goat-footed
Or fair Dionysius,
Or God, or all three
Who made us free,
And our eyes to see ?

I was so happy
In the high beechwood . . .
Who now am outcast
From that sunny kingdom
Into earth's discord.
O where shall I find it
When summer is past
And the gate shut fast ?

CHAPTER IV

EAST ANGLIA

THE dusty road from Manningtree that looks across the Stour estuary into Suffolk is not the best way to begin a tour of East Anglia, but there amid the ships on the brown water, the chimneys, the barges and the smoke of busy river life, is the nearest railway junction to that charming Suffolk picture in its green hollow, Flatford Mill at East Bergholt, the home of Constable and the centre of that agreeable country around the Dedham Vale that his work has made famous.

There is reward at the end of that long gritty climb against the wind from the river, past ugly villas and tumble-down shacks and untidy fields. Gradually the land grows kinder and the air cleaner, and the frown of distaste disappears from the brow as the trees and the quiet lanes lead away from commerce into beauty and peace.

All villages take on the character of the county in which they are set. Hence the Buckinghamshire villages are spacious about their market halls; the thatched roofs and white walls of Devon are almost like spread flowers themselves in the flowery valleys; and the black and white cottages of Warwickshire and Worcestershire are peculiarly fitting to that leafy and gracious countryside. The slate roofs of the Cornish mining towns, like those of the bleaker parts of Wales, sensibly make no attempt towards a beauty they could never achieve, but run in straight unbroken lines that one is glad to leave behind. In the Cotswolds the beautiful grey Cotswold stone takes

on a natural dignity of line and softness of contour and colour that is appropriate to the folds of those quiet bare hills. In Sussex, responding to the moist, sweet air, the villages and the old farmhouses wear lichened roofs as colourful as any the world over. So, like all English villages, East Bergholt speaks of the character of the county, for especially of Suffolk are these heavy, wide-spreading elms and fields of oats, wheat and barley, the creeper-clad brick cottages with gardens of roses, and the larger, statelier houses behind their carved iron gates. It is a pleasant, pastoral spot. The church is one of the most beautiful in Suffolk, and the ivy of centuries wraps like a cloak the crumbling stone of Wolsey's unfinished tower. Among the grassy mounds close beside it stands a wooden cage of bells upon the ground, which is said to be the only structure of its kind in the world, though the statement is open to disbelief. Within the cage, which is half as high again as the height of a man, the five bells—each weighing roughly just under a ton, and the oldest dating from 1450, with coins of the period cast into the iron—are supported upon ancient massive beams, one in each corner and the heaviest in the centre. It is said they were intended for the belfry of Wolsey's tower, the building of which was interrupted by the Cardinal's downfall and death. Upon the same grassy spot they have remained since that day, and are rung from there Sunday by Sunday throughout the year. Upon the surrounding beam the ringers stand, one by each bell, and there is one peculiar swing, with a deterring motion, for chiming, and another for the actual ringing. Upon a quiet Sabbath morning the cage must give forth a unique music that the unaccustomed listener would not quickly forget.

From Bergholt it is not far to Flatford and that steep lane which, shadowed by clustering trees that meet over-

head and frame glimpses of the green valley, drops steeply to the little bridge over the young, curving Stour. There a picturesque thatched cottage leans back among its many orchard trees and tangle of flowers, and whispering reeds, rustling elms and quiet water-music make a pastoral charm which even Constable himself could not wholly capture. The painter with the appraising eyes of Corot as well as Constable, may catch the silver light upon the row of poplars, drifting against the far horizon where Bergholt church stands, and upon the pale branches of the blowing ash trees against a milky sky. The poet may change his rhythm from that of the stream to the gait of the cowherd, tramping slowly homeward along the field path through the clover and the corn ; and you and I may sigh from a full heart burdened with the ache of beauty, as we take the river path, and beyond the old lock gate, glimpse through parting elm and ash and poplar the old white house and mill where the painter lived, and which, through the generosity of a rich Essex merchant, is now a home and school for artists. The eyes may feast on barn and granary, and the flecks of sunny gold upon roof and floor that the artist loved to introduce into his pictures ; may watch the kingfisher and swallow through the clear blue air, the dragon-fly over the breast of the water, and all the fecundity of nature around ; the ears may listen hour by hour to the slow, full music that the wind makes in these tall English elms, until it might seem that never would the senses have their fill, or memory be certain of retaining the picture. Even so, defying brush, defying pen, the spirit of Flatford Mill eludes capture, for here on every hand is poetry too delicate for definition, and rustic charm whereof in these days we have almost lost the telling. . . . There were charabancs and many people at the Mill that day, for it is a show place which invites

excursion from the resorts on the Essex and Suffolk coasts. The cottage garden was crowded with little tables, and summer frocks flitted among the apple trees, while many cars were drawn up on the bank at the foot of the steep lane. A boat or two idled round the bend of the river and was lost to sight behind the willows; there was the sound of voices everywhere. But they could not kill the charm of Flatford Mill, for lovely things, if indeed they be true and lovely, and not petty shams, are not always spoiled by many handlings, as they are not spoiled by Time, but remain, aloof, serene and unabashed, until Man comes with more insistent demand some day to ravish and destroy.

As I went north that afternoon, through a flat country of cornfields, it seemed that Nature had little to give when she passed on from Flatford, for here was evidence of a somewhat niggardly hand after the generous outpouring of growth and sweetness in the valley.

The shadows were lengthening and the day was grey as I came into the decayed old village of Hadleigh, which in the seventeenth century was a busy centre of the cloth trade, and employed forty-seven tradesmen, besides the same number in other varying trades. The long sleepy street has several fine old houses decorated with royal crests and the Tudor rose, which must be a surprise to many who think they know their England. In the west or the south such a street would be well-known to those in search of character, but the less-inviting east of England has yet to receive its just measure of approval and popularity. As I sat in the porch of the fine fifteenth century guildhall in the churchyard, the high embattled turrets of the church mounted above me against the sky, and the quiet evening light and the solitude gave fitting atmosphere for musings upon the past of this decayed old town, where even the few children walked with a sober

air and there were no signs now of industry of any kind. When the Ipswich bus drew up, the waiting group of women who stood with grave looks and folded hands like a company of Quakers, seemed appropriate expression of Hadleigh. I followed them and mounted.

It was a pleasant ride to Woodbridge the following day. Behind was the busy Orwell with all its crowd of ships, and before, the tree-lined sunny road running across wide commons, beside woods and dignified manors and farmhouses to that bright, cheerful little town upon the Deben. Kindly and leisurely it looked in the morning sunshine, with that characteristic benignity of East Anglia, as I wandered down its clean streets and climbed its little hills, and strolled down to the wide spaces of the quiet river shining in the sun. In the market place stands the sixteenth century Shire Hall, of unmistakable Flemish appearance, the architect of which is believed to have come from the Low Countries. The iron baskets of geraniums before the low front of ' The Crown' gave the touch of holiday. I wandered on to New Street, which is nearly 400 years old, and where by the half-timbered front of the old Bell Inn, juts from the wall an old clumsy machine for weighing hay. A long time I sat by the river, watching the drifting sails and the fishermen in attendance upon their boats in the sun, until the morning began to grow hot and it was time to walk on to the Fitzgerald country around Bredfield and Boulge. The garden was full of roses before the charming old thatched cottage that Fitzgerald occupied, with his cat and dog and parrot, for many years in preference to Boulge Hall, to which it belonged. There were many happy meetings here in that pleasant period of his life when Thackeray, John Allen, and Frank Edgeworth, brother of the authoress, were among his friends. His

most frequent visitor was George Crabbe, vicar of the adjoining Bredfield and son of the poet, and known himself for a very able life of his father. Fitzgerald was happier here than in the stately Bredfield House in which he was born, than at Little Grange at Woodbridge, the scene of his unhappy marriage and where he lived for the ten years preceding his removal to the humbler Boulge cottage. His strong sense of humour provided him with suitable answer to those who questioned his distaste for London, though he was not blind to the dullness of a remote little country town. Thus, he explains: 'I really do like to sit in this doleful place . . . no velvet waist-coat and ever-lustrous pumps to be considered; no *bons mots* got up; no information necessary. There is a pipe for the parsons to smoke, etc. . . .' To talk with the ploughmen and the old women in their cottages, to stride around the lanes wrapt in his green and black plaid shawl, and to browse among his wide selection of books were sufficient exercises in his later years for those wits that earlier had beat above the splendid and passionate cadences of Omar. The mind that kindled to a strange new fire the songs of the old Persian poet, sleeps in the long quiet now in strange situation, for there is no quieter, dreamier place in England, and none more modest, than the spacious park wherein the little churchyard and his grave are set. Few come this way but the tourists in the summer; at other times the long grassy path knows none but the village folk on their way to church on Sundays. The rose tree that was brought from Persia nods at the foot of the grave, but does not bloom very well there. Even upon the stone there is no hint of the rebellious spirit that once was caged in the flesh within, for he himself chose the inscription which reads: 'It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves.'

Strange and humble words from him who also spoke through the lips of Omar :

> ' For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man is blacken'd,
> Man's forgiveness give—and take ! '

Heavy clouds drew slowly across the sun in the early afternoon, and a thin rain began. Walking at a good pace in a mackintosh was no less tiring and exasperating than usual, but there was compensation in the sweet smells from grateful hedge and wide-flung meadows drinking thirstily. Pleasure and juiciness were there, too, in the ripe apples that I begged from the Post Office at Parham, where they winked seductively to me across the orchard wall. Hastened by the rain, evening darkened early and swift, as by devious pleasant lanes I came to the bridge across the stream at Framlingham, where, above the retired little town, stands the ruins of Suffolk's most famous castle. Framlingham—it has a royal sound, which expresses well the courtesy which the place voiced for me as, tired and hungry, I came into the market square and looked up at the windows of the old coaching-house, ' The Crown,' above the row of clipped trees. I am grateful to ' The Crown ' for my memory of that wet August night when I was the only guest, but was nevertheless treated with that welcome and honour that is reserved usually for the owner of the Rolls-Royce rather than the shabby tramper. It seemed the whole of Framlingham was called upon to compose my adequate six-course dinner at short notice, and that every member of the quiet comfortable hotel was permeated with that goodwill and friendliness that is so definitely a feature of the county.

The old house can have changed very little within the last 150 years, for impressive is the great early eighteenth century staircase, the Jacobean panelling near the entrance,

and the old beams in the long rambling corridors and rooms above.

Framlingham has a beautiful little church ringed in with the leafiness of many trees, that tossed noisily in the wind of the squally morning. The red roofs peered beyond, and the boughs of many orchards. There is little left but the shell of Framlingham castle, though weather and time are not entirely responsible for its decay. By a will of good intent of one Sir Robert Thatcham, all except the walls and towers was pulled down in 1656 to be converted into houses for the poor and sick, a folly that was yet a benefit by a good man who expended much care and thought and money upon his people. There is a theory that the castle is of Saxon foundation. It is known that in the reign of Stephen it came into the possession of the Bigods, feudal lords of martial repute, who through a large part of their history were sometimes on the side of the king and sometimes expressed their fiery temperament in rebellion. Here in 1475, when she was only three years old, was made the espousal of little Lady Anne Mowbray, rich heiress to the wealth of the Mowbray family to whom the castle had passed, to that ill-fated Richard, Duke of York, then aged five, who was later murdered with his brother in the Tower of London. Here also retired Mary Tudor on the death of Edward VI, when succession was disputed and Lady Jane Grey received the name of Queen. Here she planned and organised, so that all the wealth, strength and loyalty of the eastern counties was at her back when she marched triumphantly and victoriously to London, with what result to the poor Lady Jane Grey we know. It was still in Royal possession during the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First, until it was destroyed that its stones might be re-builded for more practical uses. As I wandered round the old walls and across the uneven

grass where baby chickens pecked in the sunshine, I remembered that Framlingham should be resigned to the rain I had experienced the preceding night, for the year 1878 was recorded here as having but three weeks without rain or snow. Despite our complaints it seems the weather has improved somewhat since then.

After several miles through the vigorous morning air my amiable temper was prepared to agree with the unknown lover who called Yoxford the garden of Suffolk, though despite the flowers and the twisting hilly lanes, the pleasant coppices, and the poppies in the corn, doubtless it has many rivals in the county. After Westleton, with its curious thatched church, the cultivated fields ended, and commons of purple heather and sandy wastes stretched for miles through the clear silver air on either hand, to run unbroken to ruined Dunwich on the coast. I had not associated such wild country with East Anglia. The heather made a good bed for a lazy hour, as the sun sank down the sky, but longer in that utter loneliness I was not inclined to stay, and saw at last with welcoming heart the roofs of Dunwich and the milky blue of the sea.

I was very tired, but rest was not yet. In the one short street which is all that the hungry sea has left of the flourishing city of Dunwich, there was no more room. There was not even a police station, and nothing nearer than Westleton. But I preferred to sleep on the beach rather than cross the heaths again or drag my weary feet up to Walberswick. At last as a soft rain was beginning to fall, a room was discovered, though no food was to be had.

Among the dunes above the stretches of yellow sand, beneath a lemon sky and at the extreme edge of the low crumbling cliffs, which here were not more than twenty feet high, stood the last broken stump of the last of

Dunwich's six churches. The last few grave stones, lichened and worn, leaned above the poppies in the long grass. I dismissed the obvious suggestion of the Garden of Sleep, as I remembered the romantic past of this seaport that lies now beneath the waves. The East Anglian kings built a palace here, and in 820 it was the See of a Bishop. In the reign of Edward I it had eleven ships of war and twenty trading boats in addition to its fleet of fishing vessels, and later was able to send its own ships to assist in the siege of Calais. When Edward III was on the throne it possessed a mint, six parish churches and two monasteries, but gradually every hundred years or so the ravaging sea claimed a church, a windmill, a group of farms. When Defoe passed through the disappearing town in 1722 on a tour of England he recalled the glories of Carthage and Nineveh, and a few years after, a great storm levelled the Cock and Hen Hills, which had been forty feet high, washing the dead over the beach from the remaining St. Francis chapel. Despite local and national efforts to fight the sea, in the beginning of the nineteenth century there were only forty houses remaining and Dunwich ceased to be called a borough. . . . A line of straggling cottages and this lonely pillar above the sand are all that are left of the glamorous past, and I doubt to-day if even the pillar is there, or the graves among the dunes, so swift runs the coveting sea along this coast, and so weak and yielding is the shore. Do the bells ever ring in the hidden churches here when the tide retreats, I wonder, or the steeples peer above the waters as at Walton a year or so ago, where an affrighted populace stole down to the sands at evening to see the barnacled spire of a forgotten church rising above the spring tide? As he wandered among the coarse grasses of the dunes here beneath the wheeling gulls, Swinburne was impelled to sing:

'Here, where sharp the sea-bird shrills his ditty,
Flickering flame-wise through the clear live calm,
Rose triumphal, crowning all a city,
Roofs exalted once with prayer and psalm,
Built of holy hands for holy pity.
Frank and fruitful as a sheltering palm. . . .

Low and loud and long, a voice forever
Sounds the wind's clear story like a song.
Tomb from tomb the waves devouring sever,
Dust from dust as years relapse along;
Graves where men made sure to rest, and never
Lie dismantled by the season's wrong. . . .

Rows on rows and line by line they crumble,
They that thought for all time through to be.
Scarce a stone whereon a child might stumble
Breaks the grim field paced alone of me.
Earth, and man, and all their Gods wax humble
Here where Time brings pasture to the sea.'

Blackbirds were singing lustily and giving expression to the lift of the heart, as I swung along the lane from the sea in the crystal early morning, with dancing blood and that elation and vigour of health which are the good gifts of this east coast air. Body and mind and spirit were singing together their happy staves of freedom, like three friends who run together hand in hand and well-content. To be adult and yet carry still the child-heart within, to be free of thought and life's perplexity, clean of care and the dust of daily life, is to know oneself a child of God indeed. But how should words describe that winged rapture of the early morning? Very soon across the plain appeared the great church of Blythburgh, soaring nobly into the blue air and impressing even the most indifferent philistine. Here, where is now but a hamlet, surrounding the high tower, was once a Roman station and a flourishing port, which fell into decay when the river became choked and trade diminished with the

disappearing city on the coast. The austerity of the soaring tower throws out a commanding appeal like a bugle call across the level country, that everywhere in broken walls and old surviving legends bears traces of the greedy fingers of the sea. As I sat upon the fence, Blythburgh church spoke to me of love that endureth all things, of love that is kind, of 'love that is watchful, and sleeping, slumbereth not; though weary it is not tired, though pressed it is not straitened; though alarmed it is not confounded, but as the lively flame and burning torch, it forces its way upwards and securely passes through all.'

The bright little resort of Southwold was gay with summer frocks and laughing, freckled faces, as I entered it in the afternoon from the quaint light railway that now exists no longer. And at evening the light was clear and golden across the level plain as I walked the dyke to Walberswick, that tumbled cluster of cottages and boats and shining streams well known to artists, who find ready studies for the brush and pen in the old church, the ferry and the masts, in the slow ripple of water beneath the changing sky, and the cloud effects over the marshlands. On this crystal August evening the distant farms and windmills, the trees and the grazing horses were etched in delicate silhouettes upon the primrose sky on the far horizon, and the voices of holiday-makers, cowherds and children rang like faint distant bells across the miles of level land. When I returned the stars were shining and the plain was purple with approaching night, and the high bank between the sea and the land was like a bridge across a dimly-guessed valley, and then again like a ship, bearing me across a shadowy sea, towards to-morrow's sunlit shore.

Through the inescapable respectabilities of Sunday morning, a bus conveyed me to large and ugly Lowestoft,

which was uglier and noisier and larger even than I had imagined. It was quiet enough on the broad promenade and the long golden sands through the hours of midday, when most of its visitors partook of the usual roast beef and the following siesta, but in this efficient resort that catered so splendidly for the townsman's relaxation and recreation along its several miles of playground, there was no place where I might be happy and solitary. Silly of me to come, perhaps—but then I wished to see Oulton Broad, and perhaps Fritton Decoy. . . . What was it, I wondered, that made the seashore so much more desirable for escape than the hills? Might not the fun fairs and the palaces be reared there also? Much of the country behind popular resorts is dull and uninteresting, and spoiled by the invasion of the villa and the charabanc, so that the pleasure of sea and country are not always to be combined. Was it only the physical allure of sands and water and bracing air that was responsible for the growth and popularity of the seaside town? Was it derived from the tastes of the leaders of fashion when the pleasures of the spa began to pall, or from some deeper attraction between man and the calling sea? Yet there was little of answer he appeared to give in those two weeks, wherein he indulged gladly in the artificial aids to time-killing that the resort offered. As for me, the sea that washes the white promenade and the pier is always a harnessed sea, an emasculated sea that has forgotten long ago the passionate abandon and gaiety of the days before man built his hotels and gardens upon the cliff, and ran his breakwaters over that strong, turbulent breast. In the same way the little trees and daisied grass of public parks are not as the trees and grass of the country. . . . Have the waves on the lonely shore a different music from the waves of Brighton and Lowestoft and Southend, or is it the freer, happier beat of the responsive heart that

one hears on the solitary beaches and confuses with the music of the sea ?

To escape a little from the idling crowd in the hot streets after lunch I searched for the road to Oulton. But the fingers of Lowestoft seemed to reach all the way along that dusty road littered with warehouses and ugly villas, to the blue waters of the Broad itself, where the white sails of yachts made ineffectual protest of grace and beauty against the encroaching roads of houses and occasional malthouses, and the litter in the fields. Here also, there were no quiet corners for the tired wayfarer, save here and there an isolated cameo of green alley leading through waving reeds to blue water. These one might not approach, since almost all the banks were private land except those public portions beneath shady trees that, already, were thick with people on this sunny afternoon. How shabby and hot and unsuitable, to-day, seemed the woollen costume and the beret that had been so light and comfortable in the windy mornings in the lanes, and how gay and cool the idling Sunday crowd beside one's disconsolate self. For the first time my mood sympathised a little, and unreasonably, with the irate gipsy, George Borrow, who lived and died upon the banks of the Broad, and whose splenetic temper eased itself upon those who dared to trespass on his land, or offend him by glance or innocent behaviour upon his walks and rides abroad. Here in 1840, upon his marriage with a designing widow, who was proud of her catch, he occupied a house that no longer stands, though I believe the little summerhouse in the garden, where he wrote the *Bible in Spain* and *Lavengro*, may still be seen from the waters of the lake. Here also, he was visited by his friend Jasper Petulengro, and here, too, he must have dreamed many times of the distant passionate Isopel. It is not surprising that his ambition to become a magistrate,

during the first years of his sojourn here, was never fulfilled, since he possessed little of the cool temper and level-headedness necessary for that capacity. Stories are told to-day of the boorish manner which was a fear in the land. It is said that the mild and genial Fitzgerald was the only friend he had not quarrelled with. After wanderings abroad and in England he returned to the cottage in 1874, and here, in splenetic solitariness which age did not mellow, he lived until his death in 1881. He was not buried here but, at his own request, in Brompton cemetery. One wonders if the stormy gipsy was quite at home on this calm backwater among quiet, respectable, God-fearing people ; if his strong nature did not require always, perhaps, a less-ordered setting, and the company of large wild temperaments like his own, to give ease to his rough moods and unmannerly ways.

At evening, among the dreaming woods that fringed the two miles of gleaming water of Fritton Decoy, beside the tawny bracken lit to gold in the clear evening light, was the solitude and beauty I had been seeking. The key of peace was turned then upon a stillness deep as the pool of Truth itself, that reflects never falsely, that is never shaken except by passing winds upon its surface that are quickly over. Through the quietness came sometimes the quick rustle of the reeds and a mounting wing, or a long thin cry across the suddenly-disturbed water, but quickly all was still again but for the faint twittering of birds in the woods, and the distant voices that laughed loudly, and made jokes in the same casual manner as upon the front at Lowestoft, or in Cheapside, or the Mile End Road. I hurried on to escape them, trying not to feel superior and offended. . . . 'And leaves the world to darkness and to me. . . .' In this windless, translucent air one seemed to look across the calm breast of the world ; such space and mellow light

there was across the width of water. The clear deep sky was no roof of Heaven, but a wide immensity soaring upwards without end to the confines of space, and arching majestically to the far horizon. I have entered its simple calm in memory since as others enter cathedrals. How lightly slept the earth and how serene was the lake as the night came down. Now no longer stirred the reeds, and no bird called. One might whisper here with no self-consciousness, meditating across the level mirror: Make my heart a clear pool also, Thou who art Truth, a calm and happy pool where all manifestations of Thyself are reflected, not as men see them but as they are. Discover in me the things that are Thine, and that are not always seen or guessed from the thick, ruffled surface above. Discover for me the beauty of the water's peace, the width and compassion of evening sky, which have their equivalent in the soul as upon the earth, though we forget to seek them. Give me the courage to be fully myself!

The moon was rising big and yellow above the dusky church, and sweet scents came from grass and hidden lane as with great reluctance, having discovered nowhere in Fritton to stay, I ascended the waiting charabanc back to Lowestoft.

Upon the heels of a rainy morning, at noon the clouds drifted over and the sun shone again upon a sparkling sea. In advance and retreat, in lilt and ripple, the waves sang the tune of my vigorous young blood. There was to be a yacht race, and from the end of the pier with great excitement we watched the white sails gathering. Surely one of the prettiest sights man has ever invented for his pleasure was this line of lovely, straining sails, taking the wind through the slapping water and gliding out with the swiftness of wings and the lightness of petals? Like white doves released from the hand, or a cascade of

notes upon a silence, were those flying flecks of white, whose ranks were now broken and scattered over the sea and returning for home. . . .

In the old market town of Bungay upon the Waveney, I lunched in an old inn which was in the intermediate, delightful process of restoration to a comfortable hotel. I have forgotten alike its name and position, but recall vaguely that it was near that strange, imposing market cross that is more like a classic pavilion than the simple stone structure common to old English towns. I remember the great entrance hall behind the plain exterior, the noble staircase and the panelled dining-room, the massive old furniture and the laughter of children ringing merrily across the great ballroom which was now their nursery. There seemed children everywhere, and a blithe, maternal voice following them down the great staircase and round the rambling corridors above. After lunch I left them almost regretfully, as one leaves a warm house where loving-kindness and gaiety have lived for a very long time, and where every inanimate wall and shabby appointment takes on the quality of those who move among them. Three idle small boys, a little shy but very anxious to be of service, like all the East Anglian folk I had met, escorted me down to the buttercup meadows by the river. Down among the irises by the slowly-moving water, with kine browsing beyond, and the church spire grey upon a milky sky, with the heavy boughs of the elms lifting like green skirts on the light wind, and a lark singing high, I wondered where I had looked upon that quiet scene before, with slight variations, many times. . . . Suddenly I remembered the dusky afternoons of winter in Bloomsbury, and the tea-table drawn to the glowing fire, the shadows of the plane-trees on the long windows, the lights of distant traffic winking beyond. The firelight

glowed faintly on the polished curve of the piano, as the player's hand strayed idly from sonata to fugue, caprice to polonaise, czardas to waltz, and at last drifted into vague little airs from Schumann, and Schubert, and Brahms. I remembered then . . . so many times I had gazed upon those pastoral scenes painted by the music of Schumann, where the water murmured through the enamelled meads, among irises and water lilies, and under the drifting boughs. Larks sang there, and the sun was always shining. The bare feet wandered through the grass, and felt the dew and the cool touch of the rustling blades. White clouds sailed high above, and there it was always spring. As the theme wandered into the songs of Schubert, one stepped then into a coloured boat that drifted beneath grey towers, and trailing a hand among the lilies, listened, still in the dream, to that gentle water music flowing on without end.

I went back to the baronial inn for tea, and was served in the ballroom. The sound of romping and laughter, and a lively tune from the old piano met me as I entered. The children were playing musical chairs, and Mother came in at once to banish them from the presence of the visitor. I begged them to take no notice of me, and was sorry I was now too tired to join them, as they rushed round the ancient carved chairs and tumbled on the polished floor. Doubtless that happy careless place is now an established hostelry, for I have not been in Bungay since that day. Though the comfort and cuisine should be all that could be wished, I should not care to lunch there now, I think, since the casual encounter of to-day could not recapture the pleasure and privilege of that intimate aside.

By dusk I stood upon the bridge that spans the Waveney beside the quiet town of Beccles. It looks out with obvious content across the verdant marshlands, and upon

the leafy river reaches that the angler and the idler love. Here by this same bridge, it is said, was once a chapel for the herring fishers, which stood until the end of the fifteenth century, and that in those days shoals of fish came into the estuary to the profit of the town. Sixty thousand of them were paid as fee farm rent to the Conqueror.

I stayed that night at 'The Falcon,' a quiet little inn in the small square, and learned that beneath those old walls was the cockpit where Wesley preached in 1767. Through the falling light I followed the landlady across the bulging floors of the corridors and round the old slanting walls, where whitewash and flowered paper covered the ancient beams. There are parts of the old wall still standing in Beccles, mossy and overgrown and crumbling, with winding steps ascending; and also the ruins of an old castle. In that quiet hour of summer dusk, which called for idling and reverie rather than exploration, I did no more than glance at them, but instead hired a boat and drifted slowly down the Waveney. The current carried me beneath the old red roofs and the elms, past the wherry staithes and picturesque boat yards, in windless air that held still all the warmth of the day. Little sound came from the quiet town beyond, and even that passed into silence as the moon, softly-misted, lifted above the church tower and the bells ceased their chiming. Casements closed noiselessly above me and their lamplight reflected in the lapping water; one dim form hovered still about a dusky boathouse, and a boy's clear whistle rang from the bridge, and died as he passed on. Out in the fields, where the sun had blazed at morning, the mist trailed a white cloak; the willows drifted softly to and fro and then moved no more. All was silent then, and the quiet glimmering land was as the country of a dream. Rather than return then to the world of

men and the motherly attention of my landlady, I would have drifted along those inland waters until the dawn broke grey above the elms, and the dawn wind shook the mists from the reeds ; then slept awhile before the sun came golden-sandalled over the marshes and farm pastures, to gather up the gossamer scarves of early summer morning. But the week was at an end, and my breakfast was not of river trout, but good crisp bacon and eggs in the Pullman car of the 8.30 express, and my companion no gentle river naiad with dripping hair, but a brusque father with a flourishing business in the City. He chatted and laughed and made the journey blithe for me, as the green fields slipped past and the train swung with swift and easy strength, and mockingly it seemed, into the long, greedy arms of Town. . . .

* * * * *

Early in a richer, hotter August I stumbled from the everyday world of shadow into light, and knew the passionate happiness of escape at the little lost village of Chapel St. Leonards, among the sand dunes on that lonely stretch of coast north of Skegness. Through the dusty panes of the railway carriage I looked out in the late afternoon to the shining threads of the waters, the windmills and the wooden gates of the dykes, to the miles of waving grasses, solitary but for cattle, and lonely, red-brick farmhouses glowing warmly through their palisades of wind-driven trees. I remember the vacant looks of the stolid children glimpsed at the level crossings, the emptiness of the flat land, the great bowl of the sky inverted over this strange country where every detail was starkly defined in the wine-bright, wine-sharp air. In this space that reached as far as the eye could see, one lost entirely the sense of small, congested England, of her variety and small scales and vast industrial areas. I

remember, as the train drew up at Boston, the famous high church tower known as Boston Stump, leaning delicate and lovely against the milky blue; the Dutch look of the faces and figures on riverside and quay, and at the doors of the small square houses. That this little old seaport gave its name to the great American city is common knowledge, but not everyone knows that here in early spring may be seen the laden barges of narcissi, tulips, and daffodils, gathered from the fields of Wisbeach and Spalding in the unknown hinterland to the south. This district, true to its name, forms a veritable Holland unknown to the tourist, and encloses certain marshy stretches whose villages and peoples are isolated in every sense from the rest of busy progressive England.

A low red moon lifted above a dreamful sea as the old Ford car, which had met me at Skegness, swung along the last mile of snaky road that skirts the dyke and twists every few yards beside the reeds, until it grows calm and straight at last before the first rose-embowered cottages of Chapel St. Leonards. I remember the heavy scent of the roses through the cool night air, the open casements where the moths sought the lamplight within, the old upturned boats that served as garden seats. I remember the thrill as the ear caught the sound of the welcoming sea, breaking not far away down the path from the village stores, where a little white bedroom and the sitting room above the shop, with its bay looking across the North Sea and the fens, was reserved for me. Once again there met me the warmth of that friendly family who had received me so generously when before I had stayed with them, upon a short week-end of discovery. . . .

Then began ten long hot summer days wherein the innocence of childhood was recaptured, and all the world forgotten upon those lonely golden sands. For there were not more than twenty strangers perhaps in that

little village, which is but a cluster of cottages, a church, a chapel, two inns and the shop behind the tumbled dunes. It is a village which has no definitely picturesque features at all, yet bears upon it a touch of magic that may drift from the crystal air of the Fens, stretching behind as far as eye can see, or that may steal from the long lines of the breakers washing the quiet shore. It is a vague enchantment that is not beauty. The breast-high corn in the fields by the dykes has a music in its whisper that is secret from other cornfields, and there is mystery in the still green streams where here and there a little boat hides in the reeds, and a crooked bridge goes over. Summer sweetness breathes from those blossoming gardens by the thatch and the wicket gates, along the paths where blue gentian and flaming poppy skirt the corn, in the coppices on the landward side of the dunes. There is the breathless expectancy of the First Morning as the sun comes up grave and sombre, out of the desolate wastes of the sea, until slowly the grey sands become golden and the wind rustles in the scrub and the sea lavender. The cocks call more loudly, and the small white clouds of morning slip across the clear blue of Heaven, until soon there is the familiar splendour of fully-awakened day, and the first bathers flounder through the heavy sand and drop their wraps to run down to the sparkling path across the sea.

There, upon that lonely sun-washed shore, a contented sea-maiden was received joyously among her gods. Perfect were the golden hours in the hot sand, beneath the smiling sky arched like a pavilion above, watching the flight of gulls through the radiant air, and the slow passage of the clouds. Good were the sun's kisses on naked limbs, the solitude of sea and shore and sky, the beautiful leisure wherein no care was. Good the long hours of sun-drenched silence, wherein through the

wide-flung doors of the spirit crept in the crystal light and the sea's low music, to dwell there long after the doors were shut again. Full length in the sand or diving under the water, Being was ecstasy. There was an intense consciousness of youth which one knows not in towns, lusty and happy youth which is made of the sun's ardour and the sea's rhythm, of the power of the gull in flight, of the strength of earth and the shy delicacy of the cloud. One's body there in the sand was a vessel to hold them all, a precious and God-given chalice tense with love and joy, that dared not move lest the magical wine be spilled and the spell be broken. . . . In that all-embracing light and clarity everything took on added colour and scent; the perceptions were sharper, the senses more deeply satisfied. For hours I sat upon the long white sea wall which was so different from the harsh flanks of promenades, watching the changing colours of the sea; for hours drowsed among the poppies and the corn beneath a sunshade, dropping the book of verse to listen to the mounting lark. I thought I had never been so happy, that I had drunk of the wine of the gods rather than the common elements of earth, perceiving faintly that they might be one and the same. . . . Remember those days, my thoughts, for hope and courage in all pilgrimages! For hidden in them and yet revealed was that secret Beauty that burns at the heart of all lovely and vital things, which is at once sword and balm, the Talisman of Truth and the Bread of Life. . . . After tea, the contented flesh was languorous with exercise and sun, and from the deep chair in the bay window the sleepy eyes watched the fires of sunset flaming over the Fens, watched the eager earth responding to the ardour of the sky. They became one as the colour faded and the dusk came down to shroud the mystic ecstasy of their union. Beautiful virile earth. Beautiful mighty sea. Tender sky

and intoxicating kisses of air. My gods, my lovers, my friends. By day it was enough to be with them, their playmate, the glad confederate, their privileged listener to secrets never quite revealed, to wisdom never wholly understood; one with them, strong young hands in theirs, strong young feet racing beside, the same joy in the heart and ardour in the blood, the same unutterable love of life! But at night in the cool scented darkness, before the land became bewitched beneath the blue moon of the Fens, a restlessness came out of the air and invaded the senses, that neither talking nor walking, nor reading nor laughter would appease. As though the pipes of Pan rang still, thin and sweet and with a music more alluring, for all its minor key, than any heard in sunlight. As though the games and delights of day with the invisible companions were not enough, but at night led further on to territories yet unknown, where mortal sense could not follow. . . . Not forbidden territories, but secret, lost and hid from the coarser human understanding. 'Come, come! Follow, follow!' As I sat in the deep chair of the window I heard the sea calling, the sands, the fields, the very air, the sky, as if the night were full of distant music. But mostly the sea, murmuring down there under the moon. Only once I responded, and walked for miles it seemed by its silver edge, until the hour grew late and the good family feared for my safety. An inexpressible peace went back with me after that idle wandering, for the spirit of the water had paced the sands beside me, in silent rhythm of feet and heart, a spirit that had entered mine and brought unutterable joy and fulness and grave content, and went with me up the sandy path and the crooked stairs, and to the vast kingdoms of sleep. . . . In duller hours, when common sense persuaded, I would laugh and remember that healthy flesh has its illusions too, born of high

spirits and that quickened sensitive response which perfect health engenders; I would remember that emotional youth can so easily confuse its physical desires with the spiritual. But when reason no longer governed, and emptied of emotion and thought alike, I lay beneath the deep purple sky of afternoon again, with wheeling silver gulls and white ripple of sea, I would cry from certainty within: 'No, no. This alone is real. Neither sentiment nor romance nor dreams, but life and power. This alone is real—the indefinable thing. There is a world within the world . . . my friends, my playfellows, show me the way to your lovely immortality and your secret shores!'

In the evenings sometimes, when business was slack and baby was put to bed, Mrs. Stowe would come up on tired feet to sit in the large bay, until household demands called her attention again. I have met not many women of greater repose and homely charm, not many personalities that were better balanced, and in a remote countryside fewer intelligences that were more shrewd. There was pleasure in watching her every movement, in listening to every rise and fall of her soft, liquid voice, and laugh that truly was 'silvery.' She carried peace and repose with her as a madonna might. Indeed, in every way she is in memory my madonna of the commonplace, for well-educated she was not, nor artistic, nor in any sense ambitious, but rich in that natural intelligence, wit, courtesy, modesty, and grace of character that is the distinction of some women. I have a faded snapshot of her, sitting upon the grass in her old pinafore, with her baby on her knee, while Molly, her long yellow plaits over her gingham frock, stands smiling by. It is the picture of a Dutch madonna indeed, for in the mother's smile and the soft contours of her bending head, and in the upturned, laughing face of her small son, is that divine

content of motherhood which painters have tried to immortalise through the ages.

On Saturday night there was a dance at the inn, the little house which called itself ' hotel ' but which was very simple and unpretentious. The visitors already installed exhibited a fondness for the lip-stick and hair dye, the mashie and exaggerated Oxford accent and the latest ' bags ' ; they were an offence in this quiet spot where the common masculine wear for holiday-makers was ' shorts ' and a jersey, and where most of us went bare foot. After dark, with Molly and her friends, I hovered in the trellissed porch of the inn door and peered into the parlour that was the temporary dance floor. Beneath swinging oil-lamps, and wearing paper caps, the couples passed and re-passed across a glimpse of flowered wall-paper, aspidistra and grandfather-clock ; the ploughboy with his lass, silk-stockinged and bright-eyed, the shop-assistant with the smart London flapper, whose neat ankles flashed saucily beside the thicker ones of her country sisters. The sharp notes of the cottage piano, with its blue-silk frame and old gilt candlesticks, accompanied the dancers, and, as they drifted across the lighted frame of the doorway, occasionally colliding with much laughter and profuse apologies, the watchers in the dark outside caught the gleam of sudden smiles and inviting eyes, and self-conscious glances that told many things. The scene was exciting. Thus might Hardy's lads and lasses, and old folk too, have danced their Shepherd Fennel's dance to the tune of the scraping fiddles, until in the parlour of the farmhouse the blood grew hotter and the pace wilder, until soon the pictures were swinging and the grandfather-clock rocking, and everyone growing more and more breathless in the intoxication of rhythm. Here we watched neither polka nor barn dance nor lancers, but only the popular foxtrot, though doubtless

the evening would end with a return to the old-fashioned dances. Molly giggled as she watched a friend pass on the arm of her lad, and lamented the next moment that Mummy had not let her go too. Suggestive and absorbing from the dark porch was the whole picture, with its colour and movement and mingled smells of cheap tobacco, perfume, beer, and drooping posies. Suggestive and exciting too the quick rhythms and lilting gaiety from the old jangling piano, that through the absurd mediums of foxtrot and waltz stirred the blood and quickened the heart, and lured the feet to skip barefoot down to the solitary sands and dance to the starry water. . . . The night seemed dark and cold and empty in the lane, for it was part of the outside world of every day, and behind us was the glamour of the painted stage, as we made our good-nights out in the road and went our ways.

Holiday's end came at length, and upon a certain sunny early morning by Jack's side in the old Ford van, I folded my hands and put my feet together, with no more than a passing sigh for the inevitable, the resumption of the common round, the adaptation to one's appointed place, which orders not only the outward habit but inward thinking, and is necessary background for the bright fancies of the mind. The gate of joy and illumination was not shut, but now as always on the latch. The growths of everyday life would branch about it and seek to hide it, and the darkness of the commonplace enfold it, but I would find it again, stumbling upon it at unexpected places in the thicket. . . .

DISCONSOLATE LUNCHEON

About the table silver-spread
They talked of servants and of bills,
Of friends and foes, the live, the dead,
Across the bowls of daffodils.

Through secret crevice of the mind,
Behind my social smiling eyes,
My spirit fled into the kind
And lovely far-flung sanctuaries. . . .

'A sad affair!' I heard one say,
And made my ready Yes and No,
But I was singing far away
And running where the wild deer go.

But I was gathered to my lord,
My lord the sun; on summit high
I laughed to see his flashing sword
Smiting coloured earth and sky.

But I was gathered where I stood
With beasts four-footed, nymph and faun,
They ran to meet me through the wood,
Satyr, sprite and leprechaun.

I took their hands and danced with them,
And all the earth was ours for play.
O sweet escape from world of men,
O light immortal on the day!

We were so happy long ago,
My brothers of the sun and wind,
Uplifted far from earthly woe,
Hands in loving hands entwined.

We were so happy long ago,
On sunlit shore, in scented fern;

Come day of joy, when I shall know
That from you there is no return. . . .

They talked in level tones and grey
Of this and that, and so and so. . . .
But I was singing far away
And running where the wild deer go.

CHAPTER V

SOME YORKSHIRE ABBEYS

IT was market day when upon a hot August Saturday I arrived in the old city of York for the first time, so that the usually-quiet town, eloquent of past glory but with little modern character of its own, was noisy with clamour of barter and bright with colour. The gay stuffs and ribands fluttered like flags against the grey of the cobble stones, and dairy produce and stalls of flowers made vivid splashes of yellow, crimson and gold in the bright morning air.

I suppose that York, of all the historic cities of England through passing centuries, has changed the least. To the guide-book belongs description of its dignity, the ancient gates and churches, the timbered houses leaning intimately across the narrow alleys, the noble bridge and keeps and towers, and there is no need to repeat it here. But everywhere that Saturday, round the famous Micklegate Bar which in coaching days was the main entrance to York, round Bootham Bar and Monk Bar, and in those narrow lanes that bear names as intriguing and ancient as their timbers, the people jostled and shopped and idled, so that with relief I sought the famous Minster. I think it must be the most beautiful in England, the most arresting and exalting, and therefore the most likely to escape descriptive capture. For the guide-books can never suggest the benediction there is in certain abbeys, as it is sometimes too in tiny, white-washed churches in the country, open to the field scents and the bird songs of morning. I have stayed to attend the services in

cathedrals, and repented of the impulse often, and left with hot anger in a loudly-beating heart for the desecrating voice of man, that by method of approach and the tawdry gift of empty prayer he brings, can drive away the gentle spirit of God. But in York Minster no such experience awaited me that sultry summer evening. There were not more than a score or so of people kneeling in all that great quiet and space, which for peace and blessing and renewal was like hilltops in the serenity of dawn and dusk. As I waited, the organ sounded softly, swelling in great waves about me that suggested the rolling clouds, drifting in endless space and order about the planets. The peace that has neither end nor beginning, depth nor height, but is about us everywhere in cosmic space, possessed my spirit.

The old, finely-preserved walls of York almost surround the city and make her unique among English towns. Lifted up there above the town, within sight of the broad Ouse flowing beneath the grey arches of the bridge, resting in the deep embrasures close to the trees, I met no one there in the late evening, and was thus the more able to imagine the earliest days of the city's known history, when she was a rich and flourishing Roman station. A few stones must exist still that looked down upon the palaces and villas, the elaborate baths and gardens of the famous Altera Roma, the second Rome, that enjoyed growth and prosperity for three hundred years, until the seeds of moral decay that lurk in all luxurious living took root and flourished, until easy content blurred judgment and allowed the rust to gather upon the locks of caution. It is not surprising that when the strong Northern hordes tested the defences and laid their plans, it was no great step to victorious attack and plunder. From that day the pillage and the waste of all that rich and varied life began, so that but for parts of

the surrounding walls, the toys and trinkets, broken statues and tablets, and pottery preserved in the museum at the river's edge, there is little evidence of the Roman occupation in York to-day. As one paces there in the evening quiet, with the twin towers of the Minster growing shadowy behind the bridge, and the city's surges of sound broken by the sudden shriek of whistles from the adjacent railway, the thoughts remember that there upon the green banks and in the tidy gardens and closes and quiet streets below, there is much old unhappy ground, though kings have walked there proudly since, and courtiers and their ladies made merry. For not only has the blood of Roman and Northern invader been spilt there, but also of 1500 unhappy Jews who were massacred in 1189, through folly and misfortune and that stigma which has been theirs since the days of the Crucifixion. When Richard I came to the throne, the Jews were a rich and flourishing body throughout the land, so that they were the cause of much envy and hatred. Fearing disturbance from the populace, though with no intention of slight, Richard forbade their presence at his coronation, and the order was sufficient to stimulate the mob to open attack upon their enemies. The brutalities began in London, where Jewish houses were plundered and burnt and the lives of their women treated as of no account. Despite a protective order issued by the king before his departure for the Holy Land, the example was followed in other towns, including York. Those who could escape, crowded with their families and most valuable goods into the Castle above the Ouse, and were besieged there, until, distraught and despairing, they were driven to follow the advice of their Rabbi, and, burning their goods and setting fire to the Castle tower, fell to murdering one another. Those remaining apart from this dubious and bloody course of action, begged for mercy

and help from the besiegers without the walls, but when the gates were opened to them, a worse massacre began, which was followed at nightfall by the destruction of all the Jewish bonds and securities locked in the Cathedral, and complete annihilation of all that remained of the slaughtered. Extortion and avarice may have been responsible partly for the uprising, but the facts suggest a shameful day in the history of England and a blot upon a noble city, though Richard upon his return, in great anger at the deed, sought to make some reparation. It was left to his Bishop to execute sentence, who did so but mildly, for, though fines were heavy and many were imprisoned, none paid the penalty of death for the 1500 murders committed that day. The towers of the modern city become sinister in the evening sunlight as one gazes upon them through the mists of the eventful past, and looks down upon the dusky quietness of what seems now to be little more than a large village. So little time it takes to encompass it from the walls, so much of the small town atmosphere does it suggest, and so quickly the peace of night descends.

But there was no village quietness that night beneath the windows of my hotel, where through the light summer darkness, raced clumsy motor cycles and powerful cars, noisy with exhaust and the jamming of gears, and bound presumably for the sea and the joys of Bank holiday there. After a breathless, sleepless night I awoke tossing to a hot and breathless morning, and York was no more romantic or engaging in the bleak hours of early Sunday morning than any other English town, however great her age or venerable her architecture. The eggs and bacon, though good enough, were thoroughly unattractive in the heavy, insufficiently-ventilated breakfast-room that looked out upon York awaking clumsily and unbeautifully from sleep. I

asked for fruit but, as usual, of course there was none. One rarely meets in the average English hotel at any time of day or night a departure from the traditional usage which has served an uncomplaining public for years. . . . So I played with the eggs and bacon, and mused upon the hated English Sunday of the provinces, prim, restrained, mincing, bleak and unutterably ugly, which puts a leash upon activity and a fetter upon the spirit; wherein the hours are marked by that slavish regard for formula, which expresses itself in preparations for heavy feasting throughout the day, in due attention to the commands of the doleful bells which ring out, it seems to me, with but one message always: 'O come to church, good people, come to church to die!' Indeed it is death they offer, in mocking unhappy tones across the folded streets, the death that lurks in the decayed shell of tradition when the spirit has departed, the death that offers not true consolation and hope and peace, but sleep that numbs enquiry and thought. Hated Sunday morning of England, wherein it is so difficult to fight that lassitude, which the faithful miscall 'keeping God's Day holy,' and which is so potent to overcome every natural impulse of the soul and activity of the mind, which makes of God-given time and rest not only waste but criminal misuse. Immoral day that still, after years of the civilisation that broadens and expands and teaches, has so little room for beauty and for free, joyous life. . . . So, despite the heat, I hurried through those scared, sleeping streets to reach the sooner the sweet-aired country, where the larks mount as freely and madly as upon other days, and all wild things enjoy happy, unfettered life. The waves of wind rippled over the ripening corn as I walked, and the heavy elm branches tossed in the sun. Poppies blazed in broken ranks on the distant hillsides, and there was neither sight nor

sound of man. Still the villages slept as the day advanced, although there was life enough in the face of the bright girl who opened her cottage door to me when I knocked for water, and a pleasant readiness to chatter to the stranger. Soon I passed a signpost that pointed to Castle Howard, but this quiet country in the sunny morning was different from the romantic woodlands and deep valleys, dark and dripping with heavy summer rain, that were glimpsed from the roadside station as the express had halted there on its way farther north. Castle Howard—a suggestive name for those dark, sentinel trees close to the line, for the deeps of shadow in the high embracing woods, and the sharp smell of the pines and the wet earth that had swept in through the suddenly-opened window. . . . There was a picnic party or two by the lake in the beautiful park through which my road ran, and scenes of softly-swelling distance and blue vista, and great house beyond, that invited further exploration. But it was early for idling, and there was no desire that day for the clipped turf of the banks and the rides where the muslins fluttered and the voices shrilled, but rather a wish for solitude and shadow away from the stinging light. The place met me at last about middle noon in a little copse where the footpath left the road far behind. Close beside in the sun a yellow cornfield lifted a shoulder against the burning blue, but among the young birches and the ash trees was coolness and quiet, and smells of wet earth. I lay down where the bank made a mossy bridge across a brook, and half-slept to its music, while the ash-boughs made a silver trellis on the sky. Their pale leaves recalled an experiment of William Cobbett, though I have not put it into practice for myself. He says that :

> 'If you be curious, and have a mind to see a tree in embryo, take an ash seed, put it into a little water luke-

warm, and there let it remain for three or four days. Take it out: take a sharp knife, split the seed longways down the middle, and there you will see, standing upright as a dart, the Ash tree, with leaves, trunk and stem; that is to say, the head of the root: and all this you will see with the naked eye as clearly as you ever saw an ash tree growing in a field or meadow.'

And then all musings were interrupted by the sound of distant pattering feet, and I turned on an elbow to meet the disturbers of the peace. But what charming disturbance through the flecked light and shadow of the sun and blowing leaves. . . . Hand in hand, a childish trio, they came running breathlessly and heedlessly along the path under the birches. The white frocks of the little girls danced over golden knees, and the silk jacket of the little boy fluttered out behind him in the wind. The silver shoe buckles flashed and the curls twinkled; they laughed as they ran, and the sight of them was like dancing water when the sunbeams play upon it. Suddenly they saw me and their pace slackened, their faces became grave and shy, and they were no longer happy sprites of the greenwood, but village children in their best clothes going to Sunday School. Shyness then and the self-consciousness of the Sabbath, that bade them not to run or play but to behave 'like little ladies and gentlemen' was heavy upon them, as they passed, and it seemed the wood was wistful for their laughter for long after they had gone. In the mid-afternoon I came to the long smiling village of Hovingham, which sprawls among the meadows, and wears an air of familiarity with the ways of the world. I was sorry there was no room for me in the inviting hotel there, but upon the landlord's advice knocked at one of the flowery white cottages across the road. I was received into the little dim parlour with its pots of geraniums, where its owner considered with me upon the advisability of 'sleeping me in the

young lady's room,' the young lady (the village schoolmistress) being away for the week-end, and 'not likely to be any the wiser if I was very careful and up and away early.' Indeed, it was necessary to rise early next morning, to catch one of the few trains from Nunnington to Helmsley, for this was Bank Holiday Monday, and the scarce train service was more than ever curtailed. At this hour of eight o'clock the air was clear and sweet, and every hedge dew-bespangled, as I strode out vigorously for the station five miles away, past the yellowing fields and through dignified avenues to the hills that climb from little Nunnington in the hollow. The white smoke of the approaching train curled up in the distance of the hills as I ran, so that it was a hot and flustered walker who burst upon the party of young men and maids in flannels and muslins, who were giggling and cracking jokes in true holiday fashion in the musty carriage.

I remember Helmsley as a little grey town, hardly more than a village, wide and quiet upon the hillside, with a broad peaceful square and the rivulet of the Rye murmuring beneath the walls of cottage gardens. The ruins of the castle glimmered through the green leafiness on the hill, but I was eager for Rievaulx and did not explore them. The wide streets of little old houses and shops, hardly awake at this hour, wore a sunny benignity, and the coloured blinds pulled out across the pavement were like petals scattered on the grey. Before ten o'clock I was mounting the green road that climbs above Ryedale to Rievaulx. The high hedges shut away the view, and there were many cars and flying clouds of dust already on the road, but my fears of early excursionists about the Abbey were soon relieved. For there was no one in the woods that lead from the lane down to the historic spot in the valley. And then, going past the flowery cottages to the wicket gate, I saw the loveliest ruin I had ever seen,

in the loveliest valley for its setting. Indeed it was, in the words of Frederic Harrison, 'the awe-inspiring wreck of an abbey, quiet, tender and piteous—so exquisitely graceful, so humble, silent and deathlike—the very image of a bygone age. . . .' On two sides the hills rose steeply, clothed with blue-green forest, and sheltering the fane. Away from the abbey stretched the green, well-watered meads, that long ago yielded ample produce for the needs of simple monks. The pointed arches of this splendid ruin, which was the great monastery of the Cistercians, rose roofless against the summer blue, and framed the mistiness of the high woods; the swallows made incessant flight between them as I gazed, and stirred the ivy on the pillars and the tangled creepers on the broken stone where they had built their nests. The sound of grasshoppers rose from the tufts between the ancient pavements, and the full scent of briars and grass in the lush fields. I found a broken column to sit upon, and stared up through the three great empty lancet windows above the mound of earth where the altar had been, now framing the woods and the peering boughs, to the stone foliage still unbroken upon the brackets after centuries of time, the lately-discovered frescoes, the great arch of the transept and the pillars of the choir. Time there was for discovery and the acquisition of facts later, from all this scattered evidence of a noble work of man; now was the precious time to sit beneath its calm, and have no thoughts save those which its austerity and simplicity engendered. For though Decay had swept the perishable stone, and the weeds and the lichens sought to cover all, though the bones of those who had worshipped and builded had become dust centuries ago, the spirit burned purely and strongly here among the high enclosing hills, as in the days when religious faith was a scarce and flaming thing, fiercely and proudly borne aloft across

pagan mist. It descended from the arches and the high gallery against the sky, from the sun-swept space of the choir as I sat and watched the swallows, and the tits in the ivy, and dreamed half-conscious in the slumbrous light. Was it the spirit of the devout and faithful men long dead, that lingered on about the walls that their thought and love had builded, or the spirit of God who dwelt especially here beyond all despoiling, age upon age, so that the air that quiet hour of morning seemed full of soundless music and the slow beating of wings? Here was the atmosphere of holiness the heart hungers for and does not often find, rich and high and lovely, the nobility it seeks that it may be inspired and nourished and led, a simplicity that is power. Here was all that is meant by Sanctuary, by Peace, by Glory. Not indifferent stone but eternal story, a hallowed place where Time had conquered modern man and driven him forth with his coarsening touch, that it might be left to the sweetening influences of sun and wind and birds. I knew then why the cathedral in use is more or less of a spiritual failure, and why the abbey ruins in the fields have so much to tell and give. Man cannot teach man very much after all of the highest things of God, though he may tell clearly enough of the humanities. The hands that are raised in piety often merely blot out the light, as the voice of the teacher may confuse the ears of the spirit. Time was forgotten as I sat there, with the fragrance of late roses blowing from the cottage gardens by the wicket, and pleasant farmyard sounds drifting across the Abbey quiet, and the soft clouds going over. A veil of heat shimmered across the climbing woods, and the golden ragwort drooped its head in the interstices of the crumbling turret stair. Beautiful shell of Rievaulx—I would that words might suggest your benediction and your grace, and the glamour of the valley that is your home. The quiet was broken

soon, pierced at length by the sound of hearty laughter and young feet running over the stones. There was a flutter of muslins. Then I became possessed of an almost uncontrollable fury. How dared they break thus into this sweet and holy spot secluded from the world, without understanding or reverence, and cast upon the quiet air their commonplace ribaldry? It was difficult to refrain from remark as I passed them quickly and climbed through the woods to the famous terrace above. Some call it the finest stretch of turf in England, and I am prepared to believe them. Litter of any kind is forbidden under heavy penalty, and one is pleased to note that the law is rigidly observed, for not even a burnt match desecrates these noble woods and stretches of velvet grass. The terrace curves far and wide round the hill-top, so that the full loveliness of Ryedale with its rich pastures and straying deer lies revealed as one walks there close to the summer sky. At the foot of the steep descent, half-folded in the embrace of the lower woods, the Abbey sits in dignity, like a grave jewel with all her facets dimly shining. A circular Tuscan temple, with painted ceiling, stands at the terrace's beginning, and another, Ionic and rectangular, at the farther end—fitting comments upon this dignified sweep of greensward that is so suggestive of a graceful and picturesque age.

A stone bridge runs over the stream by the cottages that form the hamlet of Rievaulx, and here, on a bench among nasturtiums, sweet williams and peonies, I drank the large glass of milk that was proffered me with a ready smile when I asked for water. It is the bridle path to Coxwold that winds up narrowly through the valley, but I was told of a short cut through a farmyard which led on to the depths of the enclosing trees. Here a wild and overgrown dell made shadow of the noon. Behind me the Abbey rose against the farther hillside,

framed within the blowing trees and the pastures, and her arches soaring up to the sun. Soon there was no longer the sound of the water and the voices of the children, or sight of the cattle in the farther fields, for the trees grew thicker as the valley curved, and soon Rievaulx was seen no more. The hillsides rose steeply up beside me and shut out the sky as I walked, except the strip above where the crest of hill ran along to the moor. Great boulders lay moss-grown where they had tumbled across the narrow path, together with the fallen boughs and the massive trunks of hoary oaks and pines that the storms had riven. Shafts of light came down faintly through the beech woods high above, where among the crisp leaves little shy things of the forest rustled. Soon, but for a solitary bird note, there was silence all through the glade, and the sensation of having dropped out of the world. The undergrowth grew more tangled and the path rougher and the shadow deeper in this wild romantic solitude. There was no feeling of Man at all, and no evidence of his passage. Did no one ever come here now? It seemed a place given over for centuries of time to the wild things and the silence and the shade. Faintly and slowly above, the birches along the ridge waved their pale grey arms against the noonday sky where the sun was blazing, but down in this rocky bottom, where no wind ever came except the hurricanes of winter, no leaf stirred and no branch swayed. The air was damp and chill and sweet. It became necessary soon to climb the boulders that blocked the path and to wade through the piles of drifted leaves and twigs. Once, while my attention was concentrated upon a detour of rock, a sharp sound broke from the high woods above, and I looked up to see a startled herd of brown deer darting in line through the trees to their farther solitudes beyond. Did no one ever come here now? So strong was the feeling of Nature

untamed and secret all about me. I did not much like the thought, as I did not much care for the shadow deepening all about. How quickly a thought may become a fear and how quickly and uncontrollably a fear may grow. . . . With a sense of shame I went on up the disappearing path, remembering that mere solitude is often responsible for unreasonable fear, and that the valley was of no great length, chiding myself the while for the folly that threatened to spoil a beauty and grandeur that is not very common in England to-day. Quite soon then the ground ascended, the woods dropped away and the scrub gave place to sand and ling and bees in the heather bells. Clear and dazzlingly bright it was upon the moor after the dark of the valley, and very hot across the treeless leagues of heather. But how clear and sweet the air and the faint breeze, preferable after all to one who has always loved the sun and space and the wide starlit sky —though the shade has deeper secrets and more magical allure and richer beauty. I remembered then that many times must the monks of Rievaulx and Byland have wandered through the valley, and among their company included those who were not given entirely to the things of God . . . that those were the wooded slopes that gave hiding to the defeated Edward the Second, upon a day of retreat and bloodshed when fleeing along the valley fastnesses from the avenging Scots, whose lands he had sought to plunder. . . . Other secrets, too, might those ancient glades bear within them, of which nothing is known to-day. . . .

In the late afternoon I came to Byland, where in the fields stand the ruins of the sister Abbey of Rievaulx, ruinous and smaller and not so well cared for, and considerably less moving there by the green roadside than the larger abbey in its more secluded, lovelier setting. Many cars were drawn up beside it, and the inn was full

of people seeking tea. They emerged at every door and hovered in the way of the hot and flustered maid who was trying to do her best for all. By the time I had inspected all that was to be seen of the ruins, the crowd had thinned a little, and I was told that if I did not wish to wait they could provide tea for one in the kitchen. That was what I preferred, and, leaving the rustic seat by the door, was glad to be relieved of the society of an aged colonel whose stock of walking reminiscences seemed to be endless. After that refreshment I set out with a quicker stride for Coxwold, my destination for the night.

An inviting village it was in the last of the sunlight, its one, very wide street running over the hill to the tall church by the great elm tree, which leaned out broadly across the roadway like a genial and giant old guard. Clean and bright were the cottages on either hand with their clipped green banks and lawns, where the old folk gossiped and the children played in the cool of the evening ; and suggestive and secluded beyond the church stood the gabled house of Shandy Hall, where Laurence Sterne lived happily for seven years, writing there the *Sentimental Journey* and part of *Tristram Shandy*. The one small inn seemed full of people as I pushed past them over the worn flags, to receive to my enquiry the expected reply of ' All rooms full ! ' Having neither desire nor intention of walking out of Coxwold that night, I became pathetic and perplexed, as I discussed the situation with the thin-faced, obviously-pleasant and easy-going landlady, and was soon able to make satisfactory arrangements with her.

I remember Coxwold not only for its cheeriness and bright cleanliness and flowers, but for my first experience of the finest cheese I have ever tasted—the cheese of the district, the famous Wensleydale. Large and crumbling with richness, it appeared on the table at the end of the

meal of cold meats and black currant tart, so that I was sorry there was so little appetite left for the full enjoyment it deserved. I have bought Wensleydale cheese in London since, with anticipation of pleasure in store, but have never recaptured the flavour of that fair, round Falstaff of a cheese which is so pleasant a gastronomic memory. Evidently cheeses, like some wines, must be tasted on their native soil to be truly appreciated.

Ethel, in whose room among considerable picturesque clutter I slept, was the type of bright girl found more often in the towns than in the villages, and thoroughly up-to-date. When her bird-like chatter had ceased and the inn was quiet, I stole to the tiny lattice of the old, low-ceilinged room and peered out upon silent Coxwold sleeping under the stars. Every little cottage was quiet and shuttered now. There was the scent of stocks on the night wind, and not far away a faint rustle where the boughs of the great elm tree swayed. Peaceful, lightly-sleeping night. I dreamed of the grey arches of Rievaulx in the sun and all the high pleasures of the perfect day as I slipped into sleep.

To the south-west of Ripon, in the wide and verdant valley of the Skell, and in the midst of that most beautiful and noble of all beautiful estates in the north, stands the finest abbey in all Yorkshire—Fountains. It is the largest monastery of the Cistercians in the county, and though begun in direst poverty, was blest in its later days by great wealth and power. One passes beneath an old grey arch, and upon tendering a shilling at the lodge, thereupon is made free of all the green orderliness and stately charm that is the distinction of the great park. It was laid out by one Mr. Aislabie, a former Member of Parliament, at great expense in 1718, and is now the estate of Lord Ripon. Daniel Defoe, who wandered there soon after, considered that :

> 'Through the whole Scene of Variety, the Improvements are adapted to follow the luxuriant Fancy of Nature, and humour her different Propensities. You see her deck'd out and inrich'd, where Necessity or Propriety bespeak such Indulgence; but in the Simplicity of her own Dress, where ornament would disfigure her beautiful Attire.'

The scene appears little altered to-day, except that it is more beautiful than the somewhat-stilted prose of Defoe would suggest. Since his period, Time has mellowed and deepened the beauty of the old trees, and years of care have given a richer green to the velvet greensward that skirts the river on either hand, a softer tint to the moss upon the stone. Here, in spaciousness that sweeps the valley length, sheltered by the receding woods and the high scars of rock, dreams remote from the world a fair pleasaunce which defies Time and all the influences of a destructive and monopolising Age. The great roofless abbey set in the midst of the shaven lawns and close to the stream, is a seal upon the valley's peace, for here, too, beneath the great empty windows and the high arches laced upon the sky, across the sweet close-cropped turf that is the floor of the perfect nave and choir, is everywhere that order and seemliness speaking of the love which cares for Fountains. Here and there the ivy tendrils wreathe the columns and the flowers sprout in the clefts. They are not restrained, for they are part of the natural loveliness of the whole. The murmur of the water flowing impetuous under the mossy bridge, runs beneath the level tones of the guide, as he moves with the following tourists across the pavements and down the old steps through the chapels and the cloisters, the dormitory and the great hall which was the workroom of the brothers in the past. Despite its preservation, it seems more than nine hundred years ago since this luxuriant

FOUNTAINS ABBEY.

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and tranquil valley, now smiling in the sun, was a tangled thicket, fear-beset, 'left uninhabited in all ages of the past, a mere jungle of brambles, and so placed in the hollow of the hills and overhanging rocks that it seemed more fit for the den of animals than for human use.' Here, one Christmastide, came thirteen monks, with no worldly goods but only faith and high intention, to build a monastery for the glory of God and the refuge of the needy. Beneath an elm tree they made their temporary home, taking their simple meals beneath its shade, and sleeping beneath the branches at night. Thus, they worked upon tilling the soil, preparing the timber for building, and weaving rough cloths, and enduring hardships cheerfully for the joy of the work they were engaged upon. Long was the period of poverty, and as the years passed and their labours appeared fruitless, many were the moods of despair that threatened the maintenance of the colony and further effort, until news was spread of their sufferings, and monies came from charitable and wealthy deans of York. From then the monastery flourished, until was completed at last that vast abbey whose preserved shell is known for its beauty throughout the world. As one goes on down the green alleys, prinkt and neat as ladies' drawing-rooms, past the temple on the hillside, the statues and the terraces, and the shadowed glades of mighty oaks and beeches, the memory recalls another scene in the history of the valley. For by the riverside here the bold and gallant Robin Hood, ever ready for a prank, came to blows with the Friar in a silly squabble. How they fought each other up and down the meadow until Robin trumpeted for his yeomen and the Friar whistled for his 'bandogs'; how the 'bandogs' caught the arrows in their mouths as they sped from the yeomen's bows, and how a truce was consequently called and the quarrel ended, is an old story of the legendary

past. It is a pretty tale to adorn the English woodland, though the skirts of Maid Marian fluttering through the greenwood and her laugh ringing on the wind, suggest a flightiness that is the merest bit inappropriate to these sedate glades. Perhaps it was the dignity and austerity of Fountains' beauty that, while it bowed my head, failed to stir the obstinate heart that had so loved smaller, raggeder Rievaulx in the farther valley, where the thick woods leaned closely and the swallows appeared to curve and wheel with swifter abandon. There the old grassy columns had suggested trees of stone, warmly-loving, warmly-praising trees, with something of the quality of eternity about them. One may not direct a mood or control the wayward affections, and it was with a certain melancholy for lost ardour, and air of apology to greater and finer Fountains, that I passed on down the green rides and to the outer gate.

The road was very long across the moor that led to Pateley Bridge. The blue air sparkled all day under a ripple of wind, and the turf beside the heather gave spring to the footsteps. But it was lonely in the solitude hour by hour, for farms were distant and infrequent, and there was no company but the curlews going crying over, a startled pheasant beating up with a rush of wings, and an occasional sheep staring stupidly from the tufted rocks. Motorists passed at rare intervals, but how rudely they stared that day at the solitary walker creeping like a small fly over the vastness of the moors. I suppose the sight was a little quaint to those who cannot conceive walking as a pleasure. Though I can praise fully the warm hospitality of Yorkshire, I have little to give for the manners of its visitors. For though the spectacle of the lonely girl with pack on her back is still sufficiently unusual (unfortunately) in England to excite attention, surely it is not necessary to express it in the vulgar

remarks and prolonged stares and smiles which I came to expect as part of the day's affairs. Alas, that the tramper, however conventional by nature and like unto his fellows in all other respects, must be considered eccentric when he confesses to his love of walking. Often the best and most comfortable hotel lifts its haughty eyebrows at the sight of his shabbiness and lack of luggage and car, and may even refuse him admittance ; his seat at table is often farthest from the fire and nearest the draught, and he receives from all but little of that attention which money and ostentation command, and but seldom the mere possession of intelligence and gentle manners. And if the obvious signs of wealth be written upon him and he is received according to his status, how lonely is he likely to be still. . . . In the lazy hours after dinner, when his ruminating mind, though drowsy with much fresh air, seeks diversion in smoke-room or lounge, he longs to meet a kindred mind there who will hob-nob with him a little on other matters than the day's handicap, the afternoon's mileage, the usual secondhand comments on the morning's news. In vain ! He knows on those occasions the craving for the lost art of conversation, for the idle following of the threads of argument and thought into all subjects under the sun, into the byeways that lead into the intriguing darknesses of other minds. He sighs as he reflects upon the ' freedom ' of this age of sport and pleasure, and compares it with the ' stuffiness ' of those ' restricted ' narrower days of Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Lamb, and Hazlitt, and Boswell. Then material pleasures were less, but the brain was an active organ dependent upon its own efforts and forced to look within for diversion. He remembers that those days knew comparatively wider and greater mental development, and certainly greater culture. He wonders where the intelligent people on holiday are to be found, since he

never meets them, and contents himself meanwhile with the satisfying company of roadmenders, tramps and ploughmen, and when there is no better, his own.

Past the famous Brimham Rocks, sprawling like great couchant stone beasts against the sky, the road curved round the hills at last, and low grey walls, that stretched like supine serpents across the upland meadows, gave place to the bare heather and the rocks. A hamlet with grey steeple peered from the valley bottom, and a chimney from the disused mines, and after a mile or two appeared on the hillsides old manor houses slumbering among the trees, grey farmhouses, and scattered kine, that glowed sleek and velvet in the evening sunlight. The turbulent land rose and sank in great curves of hills and dales here, and at this hour of late afternoon there was already deep shadow below and misty golden light on the bracken high above. The winding road stepped down and down, until past the large houses on the outskirts Pateley Bridge appeared at last, a little, slate-roofed town, hardly more than a village, set steeply and narrowly between the hills. Its hard outlines and lack of colour would have made dreariness on a plain, but here its one soaring street took on the character of the tumbled, picturesque country. Through the golden light I climbed up breathlessly to a little inn half-way up the farther hillside, sitting back snugly from the street and very bright and clean, and more attractive to my simple tastes and rapidly-lightening pocket than the larger ' King's Arms ' opposite.

When dusk had already come to the valley and the thin smoke of household fires ascended, I climbed out of the noise of the clogs and the chattering groups on the bridge and around the river, and walked out towards Greenhow Hill while light lasted. Very quickly the small town was out of sight and forgotten, and I was again in the heart of the hills. It was still golden up there and faintly warm

and fragrant among the high ferns, the long grasses and the foxgloves that gathered thickly on the steep banks. As I sat upon the low grey wall and looked across the gentle hollows in the high lands all around me, a speckled butterfly hovered near and bees murmured in the foxgloves, eager for plunder still although the sun had set. Voices far away rang sweetly in the clear evening air, but no one passed and none were to be seen there, but a boy and a girl flung down in careless grace among the heather a little distance away, and absorbed in one another. On the skyline a rocky face of cliff, scarred and lichened and heather-girdled, glowed bronze and rosy beneath the still-bright sky, and deepened to violet as the day declined. Across the quiet stole the noise of running water, a thin trickle of sound that was the only break in the deepening silence. The hour became dream-like. Golden, light-hearted end of day. There in the clear air it went out like a song, whose echoes lingered long after the colour had passed from the sky and the murmuring in the bracken and the leaves ceased. There was then the hush and the emptiness that follows upon a lovely thing completed, when no word more remains to be said, and a spell descends. The stars came out one by one, shy and small and timid, high above; the trees withdrew and became shadows mysteriously brooding above the low wall. A hare sat up upon the bank, and the undergrowth lightly stirred where his family hovered nervously in the thicket. The farther hill was a silhouette upon the sky, and the land brimmed with darkness at last, as I followed the grey ribbon of the wall and went down among the scents of night to the lights and company of Pateley Bridge. A fire had been lit for me in the tiny parlour of the inn, and the warm glow of it upon the horsehair couch and the garish ornaments upon the overmantel, the table spread for supper, and the bowl of roses,

expressed all the welcome of that comfortable little hostelry.

I was told I must not leave the town without travelling up Nidderdale to see How Stean Beck, and though I have no love for the commercialised attractions and my time was short, I half-heartedly agreed to the girl's suggestion that I should catch the first train on the light railway next morning, that ran up the valley beside the Nidd to Lofthouse, the nearest village to this waterfall in the glen. While the sun was still low in the sky and the air misty and chill, I clambered into the little train of two coaches, closely resembling cattle-trucks, and found the journey very worth the early rising. As we slowly climbed beside the widening Nidd, that here flowed through rich meadow pastures beneath the slopes of the sprawling moors, a workman bade me keep watch for the most notable part of the valley, where the river had been shaped and controlled into reservoirs to serve Bradford. Nidderdale is proud of them. The sight of these calm sheets of water beside the meadows revived in me the wish that other lakes among the mountains and dales, that have been utilised for the service of man with no sacrifice of their beauty, might be given a better name than the unfortunate and repelling 'waterworks,' a classification that suggests every kind of ugliness incidental to industry. The source of Manchester's water supply is derived from one of the most beautiful lakes in Cumberland—Thirlmere, where not a ripple stirs the shadows of the mountains or the pine boughs in the still water, and where all day no sound breaks the silence and the magical peace but the whirr of wings; yet there is no indication of its connection with the life of cities. The chain of lakes at Rhyader in central Wales, which spreads for fifteen miles in solitude, and suggests distant Norway in the groves of larch and spruce and fir that descend to the

still waters, yet bears the unlovely name of the Birmingham Waterworks. But except for the rush of the torrents over the dams, breaking in roaring falls as impressive as young Niagaras, and a colony of workmen's cottages at the head, there is little evidence to support the name. Hence, the visitor who knows no better, is not attracted to these spots that bear such suggestive names, and easily misses much that is picturesque in lakeland scenery. The Bradford Waterworks were no exception, for though lacking the grandeur and the isolation of those already mentioned, they too, in the pearly light of summer morning, gleamed below the meads and the grey farms on the hillsides with a definite beauty. The very tower, soaring from the dam, new and utilitarian, suggested among its encircling trees in the quick glimpse as the train passed on, a hoary castle of a German fairyland.

From Lofthouse it is perhaps a mile to the bridge where the How Stean Beck, tumbling brown and tumultuous down the narrowing valley, joins the Nidd. The river runs among comfortable pastures and curving lanes where the honeysuckle blows, and where homely sounds drift over the farmhouse walls, but beyond, there is hint of wild and desolate country lying beyond the flanks of the moors. From a cottage I obtained the key which admitted to the enclosed grounds, where the young stream plunges through the cleft in the limestone cliffs. There was great roaring of the waters as I stepped carefully down the wet stones that had been hewn out of the rocks, beneath the quivering branches of young birch and ash, and little oak saplings. The scene was impressive in the loneliness of the early morning. High above, the crags curved over and the light came down thin and pale through the birches, and glittered coldly on the torrent as it hurled ceaselessly from the cliff top to boil madly in the rocky basins below. Here and there the

path narrowed under caverns, climbed steeply, and widened as it dropped and twisted beneath sheer walls towards the rickety bridge above the further falls. From every crevice sprang soft maidenhair and the long drooping hartstongue, and sweet ferny growths of all kinds. The wings of sombre birds and the bright breasts of tits and finches flickered swiftly through the pale shafts of sunshine, and scattered little casual trills of song somewhere in the woods above. Down at the foot of the glen, by a calmer and quieter water I sat a long time on the flat lichened stones, watching the silver light on the foam and the whirling pools, and the countless beads like diamonds among the mosses, the deep glooms of foliage and the cloven rock beyond where the light might not penetrate and no foot pass. The thunder of the torrent and the dancing sunlight brought drowsiness beyond resistance at last, and reluctantly I remembered the returning train, and went up the high lane to Middlesmoor. Here the call of the wild places was nearer and very alluring, and the church tower with flight of steps on the hill was like a beckoning finger to the exhilarating airs and solitudes beyond. Beneath a yew tree by the low flint wall of the vicarage, where a young black bull showed great interest in me but was safely housed, I sat and sighed as I gazed upon the bare purple shoulder of Great Whernside lifting up in the west, and the shining river threading the valley meads far below. The air bit pure and sharp, and the hills lay fold upon fold before me, bare, serene and lonely, their depths and vasty distances so desirable that the heart ached for them. The thoughts lifted on a great yearning, to be more often and more deeply and certainly gathered close to the great and lovely influences of Eternity. The longing was like homesickness in the heart, and the sob in the throat was a prayer that the moment might be deepened and extended

and not forgotten too soon, since this sense of union with the quiet hills was indeed admittance into heaven from unsatisfying earth.

The landlord of mine inn met me as I descended from the train, with my knapsack in his hand.

'Your train to Knaresborough goes out earlier than I thought. . . . I know you won't want to lose it, so I brought your bag along.'

My heart was warm all that day to the Yorkshire courtesy that exerted itself so cheerfully for the stranger, though the touch could not relieve the ache for the solitary places of the hills, where I had not time to wander, nor soothe the melancholy for sweet things past.

SANCTUARY

Let no one ever come, my dear,
Into that quiet space
Where we have hid the sharèd joys
The splendid moments and the sad,
The sweetness and the grace.
Let no one ever come, my dear,
It is a holy place.

Let no one ever come, my dear,
Into that secret shrine
Where is the singing waterfall
And bracken in the burning noon
Beneath the brooding pine.
Let no one ever come, my dear,
For these are yours and mine.

Let no one ever come, my dear,
Or know what we have known ;
The ardour in the summer hills,
The interlocking days, the joy
Of youth and life full-grown.
Let no one ever come, my dear,
Where we have trod alone.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE WELSH BORDER

EARLY summer morning in the valley of the Wye, and the pleasure of discovering that sometimes, though very rarely, a district famed for its beauty can be more beautiful than any eulogy after all. Through a cobweb mist, already slipping asunder in the sunshine, we climbed up mossy steps and round low grey walls, to the track high upon the hill that leads to forgotten Trellick, where are medicinal wells and three ancient granite monoliths commemorating a victory of Harold's over the Welsh. But Trellick was not our destination at half-past seven in the August morning, but merely the highest point upon the terraces of small Llandogo, where the white cottages looked down through the boughs of apple trees to the curve of the shining Wye, and were themselves a picture looking down upon a fairer one. Lovelier than the lanes and the combes of Devon were these straggling alleys of fragrance and blossom, wandering past cottage doors, or to a byeway, or to nowhere at all, and ringing faintly now with the clank of the milkman's pail and his cheerful whistle, the tramp of the postman's feet or the lighter patter of a child's. The clouds passed over the woods and left the sky clear and blue, though still in the valley the river was but a cloudy ribbon and the lower orchards were tangled in its scarves. Voices came up from the waking village below, distinct and bell-like in this sparkling blue air so that, seated upon the wall and gazing down above the flowers and the apple trees, we were almost eavesdroppers. We had slept well under the

thatch in the cottage by the water's edge, whose smiling hostess had received us in the late dusk of the day before. The evening had been the best part of the day, for the road from Chepstow at noon was wide and modern and impersonal, gritty in the wind and beset by cars and a grimy tramp at every half mile or so. There had been cars and charabancs of all kinds, along that lovely road that skirts beneath the wooded crags and bluffs beside the Wye to Tintern, and in that delectable village they were gathered thick. Graciously lifted the ruins of the famous abbey in its setting of pastures, as we first saw it at the turn of the road, framed among the apple boughs, so that the glow of their ripening fruit was colour upon the grey. Exalting were the moments within the benedictory walls and across the grassy pavements, while the rain drifted slowly over the wooded hills of Gloucester, and the groups of tourists dispersed and the cars drove off. The superficialities of picture-postcard stands, trippers and tea parlours could not spoil the simple nobility of Tintern, but the sight and sound of them offended the weaker human senses. While not denying the right of the crowd to their enjoyment too, we craved the blessing of quiet in the gracious valley. In the rainy evening, down by the rich wet pastures where the brown Herefordshire cattle grazed with faces like sad and solemn clowns, that blessing was given. On the farther bank, across the wide brown water, a screen of towering woods leaned over, deep with gloom and heavy with rainy scent. Where we walked, the road ran beneath sheer limestone cliffs whose summits drooped with heather and young birches and a tangle of wet drooping ferns. We passed the little village of Brockweir, gathered round an old bridge in the valley, where Charles Harper, the authority upon inns, was offered ' a rambling old house overlooking the Wye ' for twelve pounds a year ! The

road twisted and climbed and the road became more solitary and more wildly beautiful, and across a grey crumbling wall we looked down upon the ancient outhouses of an old farm fastened to the hillside. All who have passed along that memorable but lonely highway will remember Coedithel Farm, the invitation of the sturdy walls and the leaping dogs in the tangled orchard, the solemn beauty of the Wye below, which here reaches the limit of the tides. They will remember the romance of the place, the quiet. Doubtless, too, they will have drunk of the cider there, which is still made by handmill in the old way. But there was not room for us to stay, and so after another mile or so, in the early evening we came to Llandogo, whose white cottages gather a little along the riverside, but hang mostly in terraces on the wooded hill, so that at night their tiny lights are scattered on the wall of darkness like lamps upon a Christmas tree. Upon the threshold of the cottage, 'Roseview,' whose garden trees leaned to the twist of the river, a pretty, smiling woman, Mrs. Heep, welcomed us at once. Before the darkness came there had been time to mount the hillside, and to make the surprising acquaintance of the low, white-washed 'Lion' upon a turn of the winding path. Its landlord should have accosted us with dagger in his belt and gold rings in his ears, for he had spent fifteen years in the oil wells of Mexico and watched many revolutions and rebellions. Instead, in shirt sleeves in his empty tap room, he sat, a stocky, very British figure upon a barrel, and in quiet voice that was almost Cockney, compared the Welsh language with the Spanish which it closely resembles, and discussed minerals and precious stones, rubber and the governments of strange lands. The encounter was an apéritif, if apéritif were needed after the descent through the soft summer dusk, for the spread table in the cottage, where

the light of the kitchen fire played upon the cold beef, the big dish of salad, the apple tart and the cider. There was no Wye salmon, since we had arrived too late for it to be procured, but the beef was good. The open doorway framed the slant of the Gloucestershire hills against a rapidly-darkening sky, until soon it was but a huge blot upon the lighter east, pricked with a winking light or two from distant farms. As we ate, the kitchen was merry with the laughter of this pretty hostess whose hair was greying to white, but who would be young and girlish all her days.

A soft rain fell all the way to Monmouth next morning, but it heightened the dreamy loveliness of these miles of hushed forest and quiet broad water, and the grave-eyed cattle in the lush pastures, an essential feature of this rich English landscape. The hills fell away before the little grey town that stands where the waters of the Wye and Monnow meet, and there met us in its busy centre a pleasant combination of historic atmosphere and holiday mood.

Through the rain we took the road to the north, that leads above the right bank of the Monnow to Welsh Newton, Skenfrith and Grosmont, and that vale of sweet mystery, the Golden Valley. Though it is a land of fertility and seclusion, the name derives not from its setting, but from the Welsh 'dwr' (meaning water) which under Norman usage quickly became corrupted to 'd'Or.' The official name of the monastery there was the Abbey of the Val d'Or, and from that it was but a step to its present name of the Golden Valley. The hills spread out before us rich with promise as we climbed slowly up through the noon, and there were hints of many golden valleys in the glimpses over low walls, of the undulating velvet meadows and woody solitudes stretching away into the mist. Already it was the

beginning of a different, romantic country, peculiarly like one's childish dreams of the West. This was no longer the familiar England, and yet not Wales, but rather a sweet fey country partaking of the spirit of them both. The smoke of hidden wood fires went up softly behind the misty apple orchards; furred and feathered things rustled among the undergrowth of the streams below. Very old grey stone cottages, roofless and windowless, stood crumbling above the roadside in the last stages of decay, as though weary of the centuries. The lane twisted up and around fantastically into the heart of this lush country that was the land of cider and good fat cattle. The apple orchards and the kine, the screen of the smoky woods above, brushed with the bloom of the soft summer rain upon the gentle Herefordshire hillsides —I shall remember the picture of them always. For they wore the aspect of a spell one feared to break as we went up the border country into the heart of the hills. Here and there a flock of geese made a white trail across the grass, or a cluster of fat pigs snorted under the apple boughs. The cows grouped themselves with unconscious artistry, so that I was reminded of that stealthy superintendence of Nature which arranges, softens, and finishes the clumsy attempts of Man towards Beauty. It is she who binds the ivy upon the crumbling roof, and mellows the harsh stare of new bricks and paint, who breaks the ugly hedge to a softer line, and covers an unseemly gash with moss and growing things. She calls flowers from the unsightliness of the rubbish heap and touches all decay to beauty. She twists the stream and moulds the hill and groups her trees where they may best protect or best reveal. Man bungles so easily, whether creating or destroying in the countryside, but like a skilful housewife she follows softly upon his heels to repair.

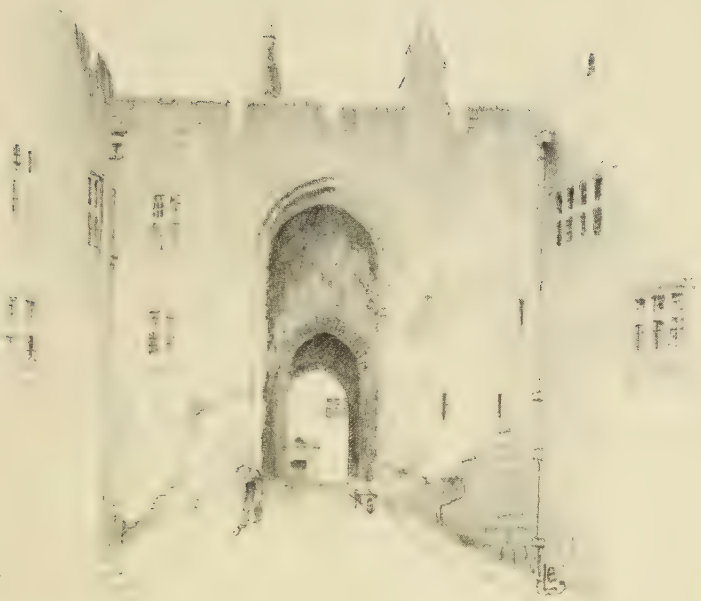
On the outskirts of a village we sat upon some large flat stones beneath a yew tree, while the white cottages, the chimney smoke blue upon the screen of woods, and the noisy rivulets swollen by the rain, spread before us in a picturesque disorder. A blackbird lifted his voice in loud concerto above the rain music on the leaves, and it was as though all the purity and scent of the radiant air were gathered in the notes. A woman with a cape over her head picked her way delicately among the rivulets, and looked up shyly to the high bank where we sat, to ask for stamps. As we passed them to her she begged that we would shelter in her cottage down there in the hollow. Quickly we gathered the flasks and bags together and with bent heads entered her little low house. A twig fire burned brightly in the well-polished kitchen range, and a fat tabby turned to survey us from the broad steel fender. There were kittens in both the wooden armchairs by the hearth, but these were quickly displaced and our mackintoshes removed by insistent hands. As we sat before the blaze, she told us of the service to be held that afternoon up in the church at Welsh Newton. It was an annual event to commemorate the martyrdom of Father Campbell, she said, a devout Catholic who died for his faith in the seventeenth century. I have since discovered that she referred to John Kemble, upon whom, at the age of eighty, the suspicion of heresy fell. He was advised to fly but confessed that 'at his age he preferred to die that way as well as any other.' He was tried at Hereford, and brought back strapped upon horseback to die upon August 22, 1679. Before he died he made a simple little speech to the assembled crowd and begged for a last pipe of tobacco. Spectators reported that 'we have never seen anyone die so like a gentleman and a Christian,' and for many years after it was said that miracles were performed as a result of the

prayers offered beside his grave. I do not know if the saying still exists, but it was common to detain the departing guest with the injunction: 'Wait awhile, and have a Kemble's pipe before you go.' There is a story, too, that the famous Kemble family of actors is descended from the martyr, though I do not know if there is authority for this. There was no sign of approaching ceremony as we sheltered later in the porch of the little church, but only the loud music of wet and grateful blackbirds in the surrounding trees. In the early afternoon we stopped to enquire of a farmer if the looming shadows on the western sky were the beginnings of the Black Mountains, and as we chatted there by his gate it seemed that the folk of the border are a kind and happy people. Perhaps, because of the darkness and suffering that lies behind them . . . for Offa's Dyke was built in ancient times to protect the people from each other, and establish a kind of rough peace between those who could not be friends. This solid wall of earth, ten feet high and twelve wide, and built by Offa, king of Mercia in 784, runs brokenly still from the Flintshire coast, southwards through the hills to Chirk, Montgomery and Clun, through Kington into Herefordshire and down by the Wye into Gloucestershire. It was a definite barrier that forbade intercourse between the peoples under heavy penalties. In 1055, in the reign of Edward the Confessor, the Welsh broke over the Dyke, but were quelled by the Duke Harold, who established peace by the enforcement of severe punishment to all found carrying firearms in the neighbourhood of the wall. It is mentioned in much border folk-lore, wherein it is associated, as in all old legends, with the work of the Devil. The confusion in the place names of the Marches may be traced to the deviations of this twisting line, where the English atmosphere and the Celtic twilight are so queerly

mingled. It was long before peace came to the Marches, for the Lords Marchers in their chain of castles all along the border were no propagators of peace, and the thirteenth century was red with minor skirmishes. The death of the great Llewelyn, however, ended the independence of Wales, and Edward the First divided the country into shires, and so brought calm and the beginnings of prosperity to that small, war-ridden country. Hence, the slow decay of the castles began from this time, except those that remained as residences for the barons, where they flourished upon the fruits of the rich lands for many years. One lay somewhere below us now, down in the valley at Skenfrith, and another at our destination's end at Grosmont, which we hoped to reach that afternoon.

The rain had now ceased, but the low clouds above the valleys were as a blanket drawn over the sky, and the air was motionless and stifling.

By a hilly winding road above the invisible river, up the steep slope of the hill past Cupid's Inn, whose stiff ascent suggested the effort and courage needed after courtship for successful marriage, we came into Grosmont at last. The end of the day was welcome, for we were tired with tramping and drowsed by the humid airs of the valleys. In the hushed hour of the heavy afternoon, the tiny square offered a strange silence and indifference to the strangers from the outside world and modern times. The fine church spire, the old table stone in the market hall, and the marking stone on the slope beside it, were testimony to the importance of the place in the past, and the old houses and the trellised inn beyond presented a neat picture of satisfying line and colour. But there was nevertheless a strange unease upon the air. It attracted and perplexed, and was a little sinister, as though an echo from the mediaeval past



CHIRK CASTLE.

WOOLWICH
PUBLIC

still lingered there. Little lost Grosmont in the hills, once a city, now but a hamlet, was the scene of much border warfare. It is also the burial place of the unpleasant wizard monk, John o' Kent, and seems conscious in its brooding quiet of the touch of melancholy Wales. I could not discover where the border line actually occurs, but only that Monmouthshire is considered a Welsh county geographically, though politically it is included in England. We were disappointed that there was not room in the old 'Angel,' whose long low front with its baskets of flowers suggested comfort and plenty within. But sufficient effort was made to supply our needs at a newer inn quite near. The half-smiling woman who conducted us to our rooms was strangely like the village. Was it a quality to love or fear? Either seemed very possible. And had that emanation a real existence or only in the idle fancy? Only further acquaintance with Grosmont and Grosmont ways would discover. The sun was shining low in the pale sky as we entered the beautiful old church, which must be one of the finest on the border. The spaciousness of the disused nave with its massive worn columns, evoked a quick breath of surprise and delight. A shaft of sunlight fell graciously upon the hollowed flags of the broken floor, and there was that remote and folded calm which is of the company of saints and martyrs. Yet in moments of weariness the flesh turns rather to the warm and fallible things of earth, and if one may confess it, there was a certain relief in crossing the tiny square again, with its groups of children at play, to the grassy mounds of the castle, dusky now with the mists of approaching evening. It was in process of repair; the scaffolding thrust protecting skeleton arms across the crumbling walls, and there were but planks to serve as bridge across the moat. Its great walls have stood the passage of the centuries well, for

several rooms and staircases could be plainly traced upon the dusk. Here upon the sheltered hillside it had many advantages for defence, and was the scene of many battles, the chief of which has already been mentioned. It stands in a line with its sister castles of Skenfrith and Whitchurch, and was dismantled with many others in the reign of Edward IV. Until recently Grosmont possessed a mayor and corporation, but the small cluster of houses appears to-day but the ghost of what it once must have been. The place was quiet again as we returned, for the children had gone, and there was but a motionless group of country lads lounging by the market hall. It was strange how this quietness possessed the village and its occupants, a quietness that was not the drowsy decay of other villages, but rather a dark enchantment. A white horse came slowly up the lane through the twilight, with a girl on its broad back. She descended carefully that she might not spill the apples and pears in her large basket. Her long fair hair fell round her face as she entered the 'Angel,' and we heard the cheeriness of her voice down the long passages as she bargained within. Supper was laid in the cosy dining-room, where various members of the pleasant family entered at intervals to supply possible needs. The strangeness slowly disappeared. By morning it could not have withstood the landlady's smiling face and rosy cheeks beneath the pretty mob cap, as she entered with the morning tea; it would certainly have vanished at the agreeable sight of the six and sixpenny bills. For shyness we had mistaken guile, for quiet ways and excessive anxiety to serve we had mistaken cunning. For had we not learned from childhood that Taffy is a thief, and were not many of the modern writers emphatic in stating the avarice, the meanness, the suspicion, the craftiness of the Welsh? An apologetic humility as well as earnestness spoke in the

farewells we made, and many pleasant voices from the inn door wished us good weather and directed us down the hill to the Golden Valley, to the Black Mountains, and to Llanthony.

The village of Ewas Harold, so named after the duke who ruled there at the end of the eleventh century for forty years, revealed little of the old atmosphere as we passed the handful of new cottages and villas, the rattling milk carts and tradesmen's boys who went whistling round the lanes. But in the softly-swelling valley in which it was set, Nature had been impulsive to spend her full sweet youth with abandon before she set her face to the mountains. They lifted before us, smooth and dark and sombre, as we climbed up and down the little switch-back roads which made of the valley a kind of tumbled counterpane, and came out at last through the wind and sun to a little inn at the cross roads immediately under the ridge. The intelligence and the courtesy of the children of the west was matter for surprise, for those familiar with the English country child soon lose patience with the blank stares and mumbled incoherencies that meet requests for information. There seemed no reason for the gentleness and intelligence of these children of the border, for poverty walks here too. There is the same battle with the land for bread, and the same monotony, and they are cut off even more than in England from those contacts with the world that sharpen, stimulate and develop. The little girl who came in answer to our wants was a cripple, but her voice was sweet and her eyes full of mother wisdom, as she limped back to execute our orders in the sitting-room that served for bar parlour. Here upon a red tablecloth stood rows of shining tankards, tumblers and a bowl of roses, while various bottles suggested plenty by their reflections in the mirrors of the sideboard. The com-

fortable old arm chairs and the ticking clock, the gleaming brass, the faded rug and the cottage piano gave the home atmosphere very pleasantly to that of the inn. In the old settle of the tap room, where a friendly collie rose to meet us, we drank many shandies before attempting the climb over the mountain brow to Llanthony, which faced us now across the last fields. Through the blue windy air we went up over heavy furrows by rows of tortured thorns, while the black cattle stared across the flint walls of the farms. The land became more rough and broken, and the tangle of trees was left behind at last. The mountain sheep ceased their nibbling of the short turf to dart away as we passed, and the plain of fields and villages slowly shrank beneath us. At the top at last we paused, only to hurry on in childish excitement to discover what lay beyond. There was then great contrast. To the east, in full sunshine whence we had come, lay all the bright patchwork of Hereford and Monmouth and all the lovely country of the Wye. It spread before us wide and far to the Malverns, many-coloured, and sharply-defined under the windy sky, like an enormous mosaic. To the south the Sugar Loaf and Holy Mountain of Abergavenny cut into the blue, but grim and sombre was the mysterious west where the long dark slopes of the Black Mountains, here beside us at last, lifted from the valley of the Honddhu. It was all a vast shadow and silence, impressive at that hour of midday, for no life was to be seen on the huge bare flanks, or in the bosky places where the unseen river moved. A lonely farm or two looked up from the lower pastures, and a shadowy thing half hidden by trees in the distance we guessed to be Llanthony Abbey. To eat our simple lunch we turned back to the brighter east, with its chequered evidence of man, and afterwards lay upon our backs in the warm sun and heard nothing but

the curlew's cry, and the echoes of life far below, that came to us here like the faint and distant plucking of strings. We knew then once more that exaltation of the height which no words may define, which is woven of the bright air and the space and the near wandering clouds. For a mountain top is like a chariot in the sky, where not alone the spirit goes adventuring, but where the body too, lifted so far from earth, may partake of something of its rapture and content. There is a sense of lightness and buoyancy, almost of wings, of possession of the earth. It is easy upon a mountain top to know oneself god as well as man. The voice of my companion beside me spoke in soliloquy, answering my thoughts :

' It is like that under the sea. In the depths as on the heights one is conscious of great spiritual exaltation. Curious, isn't it ? The body becomes light. You forget it's there often. Man's spiritual essence goes back to its origin, and discovers truths that his body can never hope to convey. . . . '

There seemed a parallel thus in human affairs—since it is more difficult to realise divinity in the monotonous everyday experiences than in the rare griefs and ecstasies. Therefore, we should give our pity not to those who suffer deeply and know the acid taste of life, but to those who are protected by nature and circumstance from all sharp experience and pass their lives comfortably upon the level plains. For rarely comes to them the wisdom and the growths that are the fruits of battle and struggle, the stab of vision, the hard-won peace.

It was very beautiful going down to Llanthony, among the babbling brooks that trickled among the ferns, by the mossy stones and boulders that scattered the wild hillside. Tall foxgloves bowed beside the waving branches of young birches, and the light slipped across the leagues of bracken and touched the water with silver fingers. The

shadows of the clouds passed majestically across the dark slopes beyond, where now we discerned clumps of firs and larches, and caught on the breeze the thin bleat of sheep. This must have been the way the monks came to Llanthony from Longtown in the distant past, when the valley possessed not even a narrow track, but was overgrown everywhere with thicket. Beset by wild beasts in summer and the storms in winter, it must have been a perilous journey at all times. In this quiet and solemn place where Time had passed so lightly, it was easy to cast the fancy back through the centuries, and recognise the impulse that had sent the good St. David to his knees. For the Vale of Ewas is not a place for laughter and the commonplace, but a solemn spot where the thoughts assemble naturally to prayer and exaltation. It impressed the old poet Michael Drayton thus, for he describes in his long poem Polyolbion how :

> ' 'Mongst Hatterill's lofty hills, that with the clouds are crown'd,
> The valley Ewas lies, immured so deep and round,
> As they below that see the mountains rise so high
> Might think the straggling herds were grazing in the sky ;
> Which in it such a shape of solitude doth bear,
> As nature at the first appointed it for pray'r.'

In the twelfth century Giraldus the historian found it a pleasing spot, ' an arrow-shot broad, encircled on all sides by lofty mountains,' where ' the monks, sitting in their cloisters, enjoying the fresh air, when they happen to look up towards the horizon, behold the tops of the mountains, as it were, touching the heavens, and herds of wild deer feeding on the summits. The body of the sun does not become visible above the heights of the mountains, even in a clear atmosphere, till about the hour of prime, or a little before. A place truly fitted for con-

templation, a happy and delightful spot.' Here the charabanc may not penetrate and the tripper seldom comes. For the journey up the valley is by a narrow and tortuous road, and there is nothing at the journey's end but the grassy forecourts and the tall arches of this once splendid abbey, the modest hotel that is part of the restored domestic quarters, and a few cottages and farms set about with trees. The scene cannot have greatly altered since that summer day in the twelfth century, when a certain pious soldier, William de Lacy, while hunting discovered the cell of the hermit St. David, who worshipped there in the ninth century. The soldier stayed, and restored it to its original purpose and was joined soon by his friend Ernesti, the chaplain of Maud, wife of Henry I. Later she herself visited them there and left a purse of gold. Further monies from the court made possible the erection of the beautiful monastery, the hint of whose grace lingers still about these crumbling arches against the summer sky. Together with much of the valley and mountain the abbey was bought by Walter Savage Landor in 1809 and is still, I believe, in the family possession ; but the purchase was the result of impulse and his stay there was most unsatisfactory. It is curious that so compelling and fair a spot should have failed to satisfy a poet's sensitive if restless nature, but not surprising. For it has already been said that this shadowed valley is not a place for the everyday. Primitive conditions and his own difficult temperament were against him from the beginning. Disasters and irritations of every kind attended him during the five years that he wrestled with the land and the peasantry and his own dishonest tenants. While his mansion was building he occupied the abbey's southern tower, (now part of the Abbey hotel), which had been fitted up by a former owner as a shooting box. His troubles then had well begun,

for he complains thus to his friend Southey, from whom he hoped to receive a visit :

> ' While I was in Spain more injury was done to the Abbey than I think it possible to repair, though I would live on a hundred a year for the remainder of my life to do it. In architects I have passed from a great scoundrel to a greater, a thing I thought impossible ; and have been a whole year making a farmhouse habitable. It is not half-finished, and has cost already two thousand pounds. I think seriously of filling it in with chips and straw and setting fire to it. Never was anything half so ugly, though there is not a brick or a tile throughout. Again and again I lament I was disappointed in my attempt to stay in your delightful country. The earth contains no race of human beings so totally vile and worthless as the Welsh. I doubt whether they will allow me to make improvements, I am certain they will not allow me to enjoy them. I have expended in labour, within three years, eight thousand pounds amongst them, and yet they treat me as their greatest enemy.'

He planned the planting of a million trees, the building of new bridges, and improvement of roads. He endeavoured to establish order in a lawless district, to improve the decayed churches, to bring fertility and prosperity to the barren land. But his fate was that of most reformers among a people they do not understand, and in trying to alter their ancient ways he made bitter enemies of those he would have helped. His trees were uprooted, his lands neglected, and his bridges torn down or worn away by floods. Directly and indirectly he was robbed and swindled and there seemed a curse upon all his efforts. One fears, however, that many of his troubles were due not entirely to accident and misfortune but to the wayward impulses of a quixotic and somewhat quarrelsome nature. At length, heavily in debt and tried beyond endurance, he fled to France, having spent between sixty and seventy thousand pounds,

and 'employed for many years from twenty to thirty labourers in building and planting.'

As we crossed the quadrangle to the long low front of the hotel, and sat upon an old seat beneath the creeper, the troubled associations of the poet with the place seemed no more than an angry gust upon quiet air, that blows sharply a moment and is lost and forgotten in the great calm spaces of Time. The big shadowy kitchen, with its stone floor and white washed arches, its polished brass, and huge silver dish covers, appeared to retain much of the monastic atmosphere, and the old-fashioned maid who directed us up the wooden steps to the strange lounge in the loft, was part of her setting. The loft was a long narrow room, just above the lawns, with rush mats upon the worn flagstones, and a massive oak refectory table, sixteen feet long, occupying the larger part of one side. There were several fine chests and chairs, fishing gear hanging from the rafters, rods and boots in the corners, and old prints of the abbey upon the walls. The low arched door framed a vivid picture of the clipped grass and the dovecote, the blowing ash tree and the slender columns where the swallows played, and the great empty lancet windows that in their turn framed the hillsides beyond, wearing the smoky gold of late afternoon sunshine. The peace of it entered the heart as we ate at the little old table, much in the spirit of those who had broken bread there long ago, their tonsured heads bowed in gratitude for the blessings of the Lord. Within, where the simple bedrooms faced each other in the angle of the landing, the stone steps were hollowed by the tread of many feet, pious and pagan, that had passed there on their way to devotions or sleep. One trod there softly, for centuries of contact with warm humanity had made them more than hollows in the stone.

Through the last of the sunlight then we began the

long walk up the valley, by that thread of a road which twists through the solitude for eleven miles to Hay, where we hoped to sleep that night. It is a very beautiful path, close set with hedges that upon that evening spilled the scent of woodbine, honeysuckle, and sweetbriar into the windless, gold-dusted air. The sunlight on the calm slopes recalled to me the smiles of nuns. At the foot of the meadows the Honddhu ran murmuring, and glittering rivulets trickled from the roadside banks impetuous to join it. We stopped more often than was necessary to catch the shining drops in the tin mug, for irresistible was the sight of that diamond water. There was no sound but the babbling of the river and the cry of the peewit as it rose from the height, for here we were shut off from the world. Here and there a white farm spread its stone walls and shippons across the pastures, and cattle wandered down to the pools, or a curlew broke from the heathery, slopes high above, that were now becoming violet in the light of the declining sun. A thread of a waterfall gleamed from a crevice ; once there was a lonely cry in the silence as high against the sky a shepherd hailed his collie. We passed hedge-cutters in brown smocks, who stared at the sight of the girl in loose shirt and breeches and her unshaven companion. A mile further we learned from a ruddy-faced carter that 'Welsh Hay, a nice little place, had not changed come this thirty year!' The mountains drew closer to the narrow path as with curiosity, almost threat, and here and there offered that desolation that empties the mind ; but at a turn of the road they fell away again graciously, as with a charming gesture, to display fields of buttercups and clover that in the late sunlight were like cloth of gold. As the sun disappeared behind the western ridge the sky flushed with soft colour, and the hollow places filled with dusk and a solemn quiet. We raced on to reach Hay

before darkness fell, drinking in the cool sweet air of evening. By a small, very old church, where Brecknock gives places again to Herefordshire, and where the mountain ash and the birch leaned their branches together to the low wall, the road forked, and we knocked at a cot close beside to ask the way. The girl answered in Welsh until she discovered we were ſtrangers, but her English in its mounting, melodious accent was slow and faltering. The atmosphere here, like the simple white-washed cots and farms, was now definitely Welsh, though we were ſtill upon the border where the mixed ſtrains in the peoples gave them a peculiar charm and solidity (or so it seemed to us) that combined the beſt of both. Soon we had rounded the hills and the river was left behind, and after a slight ascent, we came out upon a lumpy plateau. A shepherd passed on a shaggy pony, ſtopping to remove his corncob from his mouth as he bade good night, and when he had passed there was then that deep silence that tells of night approaching to the faſtnesses of the hills. But the colour had not faded from the sky when we reached the pass at laſt, the Gospel Pass that Archbishop Baldwin crossed in the twelfth century on his preaching crusade through the country. At a turn of the descending road then, as in a vision, we saw the laſt shaft of evening sunlight aslant like a sword over miſty Wales. The mountain ponies champed in the grass behind us, and perhaps we may be pardoned for musing in that moment upon Llewelyn, the shields and banners of bearded chieftains, of bards and trumpeters, and the romantic associations of the solitudes there beyond the miſt. Not far below, the silver thread of the Wye curving through the plain could be clearly traced, while to the north the chequered green fields of Radnorshire, gently ascending, slipped away into the dusk. The summer night came down pure and ſtill as we descended

the deep glen that runs for the last two miles beside a brook into Hay. Upon the gorse-clad hillside above us, scattered with trees and broken with crags, a horseman cantered and made a clamour with sudden turns and peculiar cries, rounding up the sheep. The dew was already on the grass, and sharp scents from flower and fern mingled with the tang of woodsmoke as we sought a path through the shadowy bracken. Soft flutterings stirred the brake and the last clear songs of blackbirds trilled from the wall of trees above the brook. It chattered down there over the stones in many different keys and voices that yet were one voice, like the eager twitterings of girls at a ball, whose heads are bent together in smothered laughter. In slow procession down the grassy steep the brown kine came to the opened gate of the farm, where the sound of rattling pails within blended with the voices. Lamps were lit in the farm windows as the stars came out faintly above. The sight of men and beasts and earth at their nightly preparations for rest in this serene hour helped us to forget how tired we were, and soon the pavements of 'Welsh Hay' rang beneath our feet, in semi-darkness that made all things black and grey.

This little town that stands with its feet in three counties —Radnorshire, Herefordshire and Brecknockshire—and whose name is derived from La Haie, meaning enclosure, presented the aspect of the best kind of old-fashioned market town. A grey castle lifted above the square, and the plenitude of saddlers and farriers, and shops of agricultural produce of all kinds about the cheerful streets, expressed prosperity, dignity and content. Almost every other shop displayed upon the pavement rolls of binders' twine, farming implements, gardeners' tools, harnesses and fishing gear. Indeed, the place could not have changed 'come this thirty year' or sixty either for that matter,

preferring its own ways towards prosperity, rather than any from the ever-changing world beyond. The people moved about their business with an alert, light-hearted attention that expressed itself in ready smiles, in quick gestures, and a courtesy that was very pleasant to the stranger used to suspicion or cold indifference. Yet it has the air of an English town definitely. Is it the setting of its fat productive lands that makes of friendly Hay so happy a place, or the presence of its kindly, intelligent people, the result again of the mixed blood? I give my thanks here and now to the Welsh shoemaker who spent an energetic quarter of an hour upon the stretching of my tight shoe, chatting the while melodiously upon the delights of walking-touring, and refusing payment at the end 'since it was sufficient payment to have the pleasure of serving Madam.' I should like him to know how delightful his gallantry appeared to one more used to the boorish ways of the home counties. . . . The tides of the Wye flow very fast through Hay, with treacherous currents, so that we abandoned the thought of boating and took train to Kington, one of the gates of Wales. There is little to remember of it but the accidental pleasure of the last twenty minutes there spent in Ye Olde Tavern, close to the station where we were to entrain again for New Radnor. For you are to know that this ordinary little inn, looking rather like a private house with its bow windows, is one of the oldest and best-known breweries in Wales. The cultured host, who was born in the place, displayed the great tubs in the small scullery, where the ferment poured constantly in a slow cream foam, and as we drank of the ale that was smooth as silk, he talked of his recipes for cordials of all kinds. His sister entered the bar parlour, and swinging silken legs from her seat on the table, gave us valuable information about the best routes, bits of Welsh history, and anecdotes

of the lonely days when she had been a regular 'hiker.' The record of our contacts with charming people remained unbroken, but we had not yet penetrated Wales. There were places in the south we had planned to visit where the tourist seldom goes and where the folk have little contact with the outside world. There we hoped to find the picturesque making compromise with the primitive, and were not disappointed.

TO BEAUTY

O had I all about my feet
The flowers of life that men desire,
And could my days run glad and sweet
And bright as Spring and never tire,
And were all knowledge mine, to beat
About my soul in flakes of fire. . . .

And had I swallow wings to soar
What time the day is passing by
Beyond the sunset's golden door,
And watch alone with God on high
The seas of twilight break and pour
In waves of peace across the sky. . . .

Yet ever would my happiness
On mocking wings rise up and flee,
And naught on earth have power to bless
Until my bursting heart were free
To sing the joy and sweet distress
That Beauty passing wakes in me.

CHAPTER VII

THROUGH CENTRAL WALES

THE light train carried us into the hinterland, and there was the quiet of a secret countryside as we alighted at New Radnor, a village fallen from importance and sleeping now on the edge of the wild rolling country that is Radnor Forest. We purchased biscuits and fruit and chocolate at the village shop, and walked on high-hearted. But not for long. I think he who braves ridicule and carries an umbrella instead of a staff upon tramp is the more sensible walker. But what would it have availed—what *did* it avail—in those torrents of water that poured from the sluices of heaven for hours upon that bare road across the hills? There was no shelter of any kind, for it is a treeless region where only the heather rolls up to the sky, and the massive shoulders, fold upon fold, are bare of cottage or farm. A noble sight in sunshine, but nobler still in the angry glittering light that swept in the intervals from beneath the shuddering clouds, painting the ridges to sharp purple under the rifts of blue. The spectacle of it and the bite of the cold air was sufficient compensation for the discomfort of the water, which blinded the eyes and rushed into every seam of one's garments, which plunged madly down the gullies and washed out the visible world. In a roadside quarry we found a deserted picnic fire, spluttering to extinction, with a stranded motorist beside. Her small two-seater was already overloaded with herself and son and dogs, but she flung us her only available assistance, an umbrella. With knees tucked under it and limbs distorted to escape

at least some of the trickling moisture, we unstoppered the flasks and gulped their contents of hot tea. The situation was uncomfortable, but not without humour. As great god Thunder sent his mocking laughter rolling round the hills he was answered by a brave feeble twitter from the two human insects in the quarry, crouching there dependent on his whim. But were we so dependent? The shelter was ridiculously insufficient, and all clouds must cease disburdening at last. So with heads down to the wind, and the umbrella held before like a shield, we flapped and dripped and struggled to the one and only inn, two miles from Penypont and six from Llandrindod Wells. In the big settles we found comfort while hats and mackintoshes dripped in the porch, and the fragrant smell of apple pies from the oil-stove mingled with the odour of tobacco and the hams on the rafters. Conscious of much ginger beer within, and more or less dry again, we took heart from the lightening sky behind the ragged clouds, and tramped on. But the noon was set in a minor key, and fated to run so to the end. As we sat waiting for tea in the hushed sitting room of the strange cottage, watching the sunset burn like copper behind the pines on the hill, trying to dispel the gloom of the sinister twilight with chatter and feeble wit, it was poor consolation to talk airily of 'artistic conclusion.' The place had looked so pretty from without, with its thatched roof, rose-scented lattices and blue door, its large garden full of stocks and marigolds and peonies, spilling their fragrance generously after the rain. The unsmiling woman who opened to us certainly did not suggest the kind and maternal, but she offered to dry our clothes and make us as comfortable as she could. It had been a mistake to accept, of course, but we were too tired and cold to go farther. The little house was clean and comfortable, but fireless, save in the big secret kitchen,

and so silent that one whispered involuntarily. Its owner made no sound as she moved about her duties, and there was no friendly cat or dog to lighten the heavy air and give it the warmth of life. It seemed like a witch's cottage as she led us up to the tiny, untidy bedrooms under the roof, and silent and unsmiling still, restored to us our dried garments one by one; like a witch's cottage as I searched for her in the darkness down broken steps to the great shabby kitchen beyond, where candlelight threw fantastic shadows on the stained walls as she moved about the preparations for supper. In the little room where we ate there were bookcases stuffed with ancient, dusty tomes, suggesting a kind of humanity that once these walls had known, very long ago. Though her hair was white and her tall frame somewhat gaunt, she was not so very old. The tragic thought came to us that already she was dead, though her body moved still in the little house where she took boarders to earn her bread. Was there aught behind that wall of indifference and negation, and what kind of feminine creature had she been in the days before the shock came (if shock were indeed the cause) that had so crushed the spirit within? Pondering thus, discomfort gradually gave place to a great pity, which ached to restore warmth and a little of the joy of life to this dead house that was so symbolic of its owner. But she was not to be quickened or melted . . . and the compassion could not completely dispel the un-ease of that hushed summer night, though the scent of the flowers stole sweetly through the lattices and the stars opened bright eyes upon a serene world. Dawn, with its attendant bird-song and sunshine, came with relief, and though the spread breakfast table looked inviting enough in the open window, we were glad later to latch the gate behind us. The air tasted strangely sweet and pure that morning, and we sniffed it and shook

ourselves with a little of the eagerness of prisoners, though with apology too, and perhaps a prayerful thought for all those to whom life has brought great burdens.

It was high noon before we reached Llandrindod Wells, for the directions of stupid and mischievous farmers' boys had conspired to keep us wandering in a tangle of wet field-paths that skirted the hills. It mattered but little in that clear vigorous air, where the pools were silver mirrors shining to an April sky, where the shadows on the bare hillsides were like the flying skirts of girls. Soon we came into a rich countryside where the lush hillsides grew steeper and flowered into woods and groves, as though Nature had been seized suddenly with the impulse for festival and holiday. Proudly the heavy boughs of spruce and beech and elm lifted after the rain, and cast down glittering showers as the wind swayed them. Burnished was every leaf and sharp every detail of the landscape in the sun as we followed the path down the grassy slopes. It ran by the white wall of a farm, where its owner, in gaiters and patched coat, bade us bright good morning as we passed. Of him we enquired the further distance, and appearing to have nothing better to do, straightway he sauntered along with us for the next two miles. Our salutations, worthy gentleman, for the pleasure of your company down the green and leafy way to Shaky Bridge where the trees lean over the foaming water and stipple the banks with dancing light and shade. For in that brief encounter was communicated to us a vitality, gaiety, and evidence of that mental, physical and spiritual health that characterises the best English yeomen. Your type is met but little in the cities, where the artificial airs and thousand goads and allures tend to emasculate a man and confuse his individual nature.

The pleasant airs of Strauss drifted through the gardens from the Pump Room, where the fiddles entertained the unhappy invalids. The sight of the strange hobbling women, the bulbous colonels, and the depressed occupants of the bath-chairs—types familiar to all spas—was a forcible reminder of one's youth. And though for the stomach's sake I paid my penny and received my glass from the pretty girl at the Springs, the salutary action of this very lively mineral water was not alone responsible for the kittenish mood that possessed me there among the flowers and the freaks.

Seeking Rhayader, we became lost in footpaths, and even the compass failed to help. But if we had not been lost, we should not have knocked at the hillside farm, white upon the emerald in the sun, and so should have missed the sweet face of the girl who opened to us. In response to a request for water, she brought forth large foaming glasses of milk, but protested emphatically against payment. In carpet slippers she accompanied us delicately through the mud and the long grass down the hill, to direct us to the proper gate. The memory of her face and voice, and indeed her whole gentle bearing, stayed long in the mind, for they suggested that innate culture that is not the result of education, a courtesy which springs from sensibility rather than acquirement, and a sweetness which has almost disappeared from the women of the towns. I loved and responded to those country-women of Wales and the Border. In their cottages when sheltering from the rain, or applying for lodging for the night, we were received with the dignity and disinterestedness of the true hospitality, and all duties were laid aside that they might fully serve the stranger. Quietly they moved about their work, and their natures spoke in their soft melodious voices. They were individual, but one in their content that yet was not

sloth, in their instinctive good manners, and happy maternity. To be with them was spiritual nourishment, for not only to the stranger but to their families they appeared to give freely and naturally of their best. They had not heard much of emancipation and their 'rights' in that remote country district, and so were untouched as yet by that passion for advancement, for freedom and modernity that possesses the city woman. There is much to be learned from them. Many of them are middle-aged at thirty, and their hands are scarred and figures coarsened for want of a little care. Their clothes are behind the fashions and in poor taste; their minds hold little beyond the immediate affairs of village and home, and their opinions, if any, are masculine echoes. They compare unfavourably in every worldly way with the modern girl—yet they are able to communicate a spiritual quality where she is barren. I do not say that she should emulate them, but I should like her to remember that intellect and freedom and power are useless in the world without good manners, gentleness and poise. For these old graces are of the heart, which to-day is regarded as a rather sentimental organ, resembling somewhat a benevolent old uncle whom we love, of course, but of whom we are also just a little ashamed. We are no longer simple, but strive to conform to fashionable standard of conduct and attitude. Fearful of ridicule and 'getting behind,' we are anything but individual, and drift, almost unconsciously, upon the tide of the period. A period is reflected always in the faces of its women, and hence, the modern faces are hard and strained. In few of them is the quietness and softness of patience and loving-kindness which lie somewhere inherent in the feminine nature. She thinks she has progressed, and will point here and there to prove it. In the material world of every-day she certainly has,

but in the larger life in which we are rooted and which swings eternally and changelessly about us, I am not so sure.

In Rhayader there was no mistaking the Welsh atmosphere, for there were no pretensions to the picturesque in the long street of square grey buildings, humble little shops, and old inns. The original name was 'Rhaiadr-Gwy,' meaning 'Falls of the Wye,' though this torrent, which existed before the rebuilding of the bridge, was not to be compared to the great chain of lakes and dams in the Elan Valley, which is now one of the wonders of Wales. The long street was cheerfully loud with the holiday mood of Saturday afternoon, and the cafés overflowed with cyclists. Every one was very friendly. We were rapidly discovering that the Welsh are mostly a crude people who know little of the art of living, of the graces and the subtleties that shape the plastic stuff of existence to beauty and direction as well as utility. But because of that lack they appear to be also free from sham and reticence, and (despite all that has been said of them) from suspicion and avarice. It is so with most uncultured peoples, for education brings corruption and mass-production of types, as well as progress. Everywhere, in the Welsh towns we visited, the cafés were no better than good 'pull-ups for carmen,' where we sat on benches before tablecloths full of holes and not always clean, though the food was abundant and very cheap. The hotels were slovenly and dirty, but only apparently because their owners knew no better, and the bills were always low. The shopkeepers have no idea of display, but their courtesy and readiness to help the casual stranger, simply and without hope of return, is impressive. They may be mean and crafty in their personal dealings, but it was not craft that inspired the kindness and the warmth that met us in village and town alike, and

it is obvious that a sincere diffidence about charges is hardly a sign of avarice.

The 'Castle' at Rhayader proved to be the most comfortable hotel of the tour. It is not, I believe, *the* hotel, for that honour belongs to the 'Lion,' neither is it to be found in the A.A. list of recommended hotels, but behind its solid white front and large bow windows was the mellow atmosphere of the old tradition, now rapidly passing away in this age of combine. Within, one scented immediately the warm airs of age and comfort, and that unstressed efficiency that is the result of good supervision. Within the space of five minutes we were very much at home in that easy-going old inn, where the floors ran at perilous angles beneath the attic beams, and the beds were deep and the linen spotless. We were conscious of harmony in every way, as though the old walls had been possessed for centuries by the spirit of a kind and happy people. Certainly we were greeted and attended there not by landlord and landlady but by friends, who made our brief sojourn with them a pleasant memory. The long table in the dining-room was spread as if for a wedding, with eight tall vases of gladioli, dahlias, delphiniums and nasturtiums arranged behind the glass and silver. The maid informed us 'it was always like that.' The custom seemed symbolic of the welcome that is such a feature of Welsh hospitality—that brings out its best for the stranger.

At sight of the great threatening clouds next morning we hovered at the inn door uncertainly. For our plan was to take the old coach road to Devil's Bridge and Aberystwyth, which goes through very solitary mountain country. A burly angler eyed us from his breakfast table in the bow window, and shortly rose to enquire if we were going his way, and if we would care for a lift. Through his courtesy then we were enabled to view the

fifteen miles of the Elan Valley Reservoirs that form the grand sight of Rhayader. To the description of this feat of the Birmingham Waterworks the night before we had listened indifferently, aware of the natural but sometimes exaggerated pride that all towns have for their engineering achievements. But this morning, within sight of them, we capitulated. For before us, running parallel with the fine winding motoring road, stretched the six great lakes that once had been a mountain stream tumbling down the gorge, before the great stone dams were constructed to hold the 18,000,000,000 gallons of water for the supply of the city of Birmingham, and send it for ninety miles through the Welsh hills. When we had passed the one lonely hotel under the hillside, the workmen's cottages, and the vast machinery at this natural gateway of the mountains, an impressive sight spread before us. Over the great dams, the largest of which is 100 feet high and 200 feet wide, the falls poured in thunder and beauty and rhythmic power, to recover below a blue and smiling calm, that reflected sharply the green slopes above, and the islands of pines and larches, and the high drifting clouds in the summer sky. A perfect solitude brooded there for mile upon mile among the folds of the hills, a silence that no bird disturbed, a natural grandeur and all-possessive calm unshaken by any wind. The grave landscape of large contour and pure colour, so dignified, so simple and so noble, seemed not of England but of the romantic lands of the north, where the vast and stilly forests brood above the fjords, and where a century may pass and leave no more sign than a day. By the great bridge of solid masonry spanning the torrent we waited for our friend the angler who, to search for bait, had descended the path that wound steeply down among the ferns and the trees to the water below. With the roar of the waters loud about us and the shadows of

the pines black upon the lake, we talked of the young poet Shelley, whose submerged dwelling, 'a plain four-storied house with lofty wings,' lies invisible beneath. Here he came in his headstrong youth from Oxford in 1811, and a year later brought his first young wife, the unfortunate Harriet. It is said that his favourite amusement was to descend the falls of the Elan upon a plank, but in his day it must have been a very different torrent from the one beneath us, that received the mercurial young body. At the head of the last lake, where the hills fall away before the source, and make a great spaciousness of earth and sky and shining water, we attempted to say farewell to our generous friend. He suggested that a little patience might reward us with a trout for lunch. We waited a long time, while he donned oilskins and waders and arranged his gear, while he picked his way through the shallows and the boulders and cast his line at intervals. We followed him, over the soft hummocks of turf and bright green bog, while the sun cast fitful silver light upon the pools and the polished stones of the river bed, where the freshets plunged and tumbled in foam. The quiet of the wide solitude was profound, and the old Ford by the shaky wooden bridge, dwarfed by the landscape, looked a silly incongruous thing. We grew tired of splashing about at last, and cold in the sharp mountain air, and so turned to go. But almost immediately a shout hailed us, and a broad grin spread over his ruddy face as he held up the shining, quivering prize. But we did not take the trout, since our only pan was a fruit tin unemptied as yet of its contents, and the dripping, smelly thing was hardly suitable company for undergarments in the knapsack or cigarettes in the pocket. Soon the solitary fisherman was lost to sight as we followed the valley path, and the river became but a bright trickle over a stony bed, through green marshes

rich in peat. There were no sheep upon the crags above and but lean black cattle with their feet in the pools. The strong odour of the burning peat assailed our nostrils as we passed a white-washed hovel or two beside the path, which were the only signs of life in the waste. An hour passed, and there was then the clatter of hoofs above, as a family party on horseback came cantering over the lower slopes, the farmer on his brown cob, the little girl on a white pony, a pretty picture with her flower-blue eyes and yellow hair, and her brother on a speckled grey mare. They bade us hearty good-morning and rode on, and the silence fell around us again like a dropped curtain. It must have been a long and weary journey that the coaches made by this road in the past, for every yard is flint-beset as it descends and climbs over the broken land, washed by swollen streams and distorted by the curving hills. It twisted soon decisively into the mountains, and took difficult way beside the running Ystwyth (which name means 'flexible and winding'). The rocky walls that lifted beside us were streaked with the threads of many rivulets, gashed into deep clefts, or softened by oak saplings or the brightly-berried mountain ash. The beautiful mountain ash, at its best in August with its profusion of scarlet fruit, was beside us all the way upon that stormy Sabbath, giving the only colour to a landscape of wild grandeur. It seemed a symbol for the hardy grace of pliant, beautiful youth, so that it was as though a nut-brown maid ran beside us among the rills, bright-eyed and ruddy, laughing and eager-hearted, her slim feet splashing in the water, her copper hair flaming in the sun. The fair maid Echo was with her, catching the sounds of our voices and flinging them to and fro upon the rocky walls.

At noon, within sight of a cluster of grey cottages beside the deserted lead-mines, we sat upon rough stones

by a waterfall to eat. But the tins and flasks were no sooner opened than the clouds which had threatened for hours grew blacker and sinister above, and began to scatter their heavy drops. We ran for the cottages, and beneath half a roof stretched over the weeds and wild-flowers that once had been the kitchen floor, we sheltered shivering, while the noise of the blinding rain mingled and was one with the noise of the waters, and the mountains were but unsubstantial shadows behind a veil. After a long half-hour in that inadequate refuge we discovered with delight that the adjoining whole cottage was empty, its broken door fastened with string. It was warm and dry inside and the hard floor of earth abundantly strewn with a litter of twigs and leaves for a fire, so that soon there was a cheerful blaze in the great chimney-piece, and a door-post to sit upon. There we drank tea and smoked in comparative comfort. The afternoon was strangely like a fairy-tale, as though this little stone house had awaited us through Time, that the rare hours of beauty and quiet that we spent there might be brushed upon the memory for ever. The rain never ceased, but hung, hour by hour, like a curtain before the silhouette of the mountains. Through it, across the path beside the open door, peered the beautiful lady of the mountain ash, tossing in the wind, her cheeks growing ruddier for the slap of the waters. To the north, beyond the village end, a waterfall plunged sheer from the height down its narrow rocky cleft. Once a horseman passed, but he served but to make the sense of solitude deeper, for there was utter quiet again when the sound of the hoofs had died away. We knew then that the whole place had been deserted a long time. There was a strange sense of pause and withdrawal, of accidental escape, of having slipped through a hole in the world of shadows that we knew into the beautiful secret living world behind . . .

gossamer, silken and luminous, but brighter than the light of a thousand suns. The land of Never Never, and of dreams, but of a grave loveliness and—praise be to God !—the land of reality too, more real than aught we may touch or see, and for ever to endure. Were we mortal as we sat silently in the half-light by the blaze of the twig fire, with the rough earth for carpet and none for company but the spirits of air and fire and water, there made manifest ? Not less than mortal, but more, possessing our divine nature for an enchanted hour. Alas, that the lips may not tell what the spirit alone comprehends.

Towards late afternoon the rocks and slaty mountain-side were left behind, and we approached a romantic country, the valley of the Ystwyth, where the forests of larch and pine upon the gracious hillsides were like the bloom upon a grape, and the river flowed invisible below in the deep ravine. White farms appeared in the pastures below, and the path became a road between high banks and hedgerows, skirting here and there woods of birches, where the green and silver boughs leaned over foaming water and mossy boulders soft as velvet. The evening came, and the rain ceased. We passed through a village or two, possessed by happiness. The time for evening service found us climbing the steep green lane that leads to Hafod Church, where is the famous Chantry monument, executed by the sculptor of that name in memory of the beautiful daughter of the Johnes family, who, the last of her line, died in her early maidenhood. Here, upon the site of a hunting lodge of the Welsh chieftains, which later grew into a summer residence for the squires, and became famous for its gathering of the bards, was built at the end of the eighteenth century a very beautiful mansion by the family. It was famous for its artistic treasures and its library, where were housed many

invaluable Welsh manuscripts. A printing press was established in the grounds, schools were built, the services of doctor and apothecary retained for attendance upon the cottagers, and the whole surrounding landscape converted to beauty and utility. Altogether, over two million trees, comprising larches, oaks, beeches, ash trees and elders were planted on the surrounding mountain-sides, and crops of wheat and rye and barley flourished in the sheltered places. But in 1807, only a few years after its completion, the great house with its irreplaceable treasures, especially the library, was almost completely destroyed by fire ; which event is spoken of still as the great fire of Hafod. It is evident that the death of the girl, following upon this event, was tragedy upon tragedy. It was not possible to inspect the monument, since it was time for evening service. Breasting the hill in our dripping clothes, vagabonds in appearance as well as spirit, we accidentally became incongruous part of the procession of natives on their way to church. There were dapper young men as well as maidservants among them, following the tradition of their fathers from taste as well as duty. Their piety, despite their healthy laughter, was evident in their bearing. Indeed, we were in a foreign country where a strange language was but one of the minor differences. By the stone stile above the lych gate, we stopped to gaze down over the sward to the graceful tower embowered in trees below, and the distant woods mantling the sky beyond. It was a fair and peaceful picture in the pale evening. The parson in his flapping cloak left the group at the gate and approached us, but fearing invitation, we made to hasten on. But his intention was but to make sympathetic enquiry of our physical condition, of our lodging for the night, and to offer friendly advice and respectful interest. The bell ceased tolling as he talked, and the last wor-

shipper disappeared within, but still out in the muddy lane he continued to chat and offer what direction he could to the English strangers. And who shall say that the blessing of that gentle Christian under the dripping trees was less than the sanctification we should have received within the holy walls below? For the day was sanctified since morning, and through the sunlight of the evening we walked conscious of it still.

Soon the pinewoods and the baby cascades gave place to bare upland country, where we heard no more the rushing of the streams. The deep silence, windless and birdless, was strange after the water music that had accompanied us since morning. Golden clouds of sunset rose like palaces above the rocky solitudes. Here, where was no ringing of church-bells or sight or sound of man, brooded a primitive majesty and peace very fitting to the spirit of Holy Day. We were wrapped in its folds as we walked, not as man and woman reflecting upon their Maker and directing the thoughts to Sabbath penitence and piety, but rather as pilgrims on the way to Truth and Beauty, who for a brief time are embraced in the cloaks of the Lordly Ones and lifted from the weariness and dust of journeying into glory. A great cloud followed the sinking of the sun, and beneath the pelting rain again we ran for the beginnings of the village, and darted into the first cottage porch that offered shelter. The door opened at once, and a man in the shirt sleeves of Sunday ease asked us in to the fireside. It was a little room, ruddy with the glow from the peat fire on the great open hearth, where close beside sat a rosy-cheeked Welsh girl with a baby on her knee. Her red lips smiled welcome, and the child crowed at sight of the strangers. The simple picture of young motherhood there in the light of the fire was sweet seal upon the evening. It might indeed have been that our steps were guided

hither, that the wondrous and divine might swing the full circle to the elemental and human, and the spirit know the grave harmony of the whole. The shower over, we continued the winding road that runs along the edge of the hills, beside a great valley, and came soon to the hotel built above the famous Devil's Bridge itself, with wide platform for cars, and balustrade hanging over the ravine and the wonderful falls of the Rheidol. I do not know if it is the 'hospice' where George Borrow stayed upon a night of wind and rain, which he describes as 'an immense lofty cottage with projecting eaves' built by one of the Dukes of Newcastle and containing a 'stately staircase and noble gallery.' It is possible, though the freshly-painted exterior of this modern hotel, devoted now to the needs of tripper and tourist, suggests that it has known changes since his day. We were too wet and hungry and tired to admire the famous view of the cataract thundering down the mountainside, and to the apparent disappointment of the idling waiters behind the panes, hurried on up to the village and were received at once in the little Post Office, whose simple accommodation was more suitable to our appearance and our desires. For I have yet to become insensible to the lifted eyebrows of flunkeys, whose cold stares suggest that smart hotels are not for those who arrive minus car and luggage and dressed in rough walking clothes. Also, I shall always consider the hospitality of the cottage, which observes the spirit of service, infinitely preferable to that of the hotel, which seldom observes anything but the letter.

The sun came out warm and bright as we returned to the hotel next morning; it shone pleasantly upon the inviting white chairs and tables under the balcony, the great pots of shrubs and geraniums by the circular balustrade, and the inevitable postcard kiosks under the trees. Despite its exploitation, the scene beyond and far

below was a noble sight. It is, of course, a familiar show-place to all who have visited that part of Wales. Down a cleft in the richly-wooded mountainside the cascade swept to the wild hollow far below, where the waters of the Rheidol and the Monach unite in storm of curdling waters among the tangled trees of the gorge, before they flow away in quietness to the west. Though it is our practice to avoid the commercialised beauty spots, with their 'fairy glens' and 'magic caves,' their notice-boards and invitations to tea, this morning we broke the rule and paid our shillings to the depressed youth at the roadside wicket.

The boughs shook their heavy rain drops thickly upon us as we descended the mossy steps, but the sun was thrusting his golden shafts upon fall and glade and branch, and making all things fresh and beautiful. George Borrow's description of the scene appears upon the leaflet which serves as guide to the Falls, but there is no need to quote it here; the reader doubtless is familiar already with that shimmering picture of sunlight and spray, foam and trembling leaves, down among the chaos of rocks, with the thunder that the five successive falls make through the dingle, and with the crumbling old Devil's Bridge itself, flung across the chasm beneath a modern one since built above. He has probably also heard of the cave here that housed the ferocious children of the legendary Plant de Bat three hundred years ago. How the girl stayed at home in the cave while her brothers robbed at night, and how at last they murdered a fine gentleman and were discovered, and accordingly were executed while their sister was burned, may be read at length in *Wild Wales*.

As we climbed into the light train of open carriages that runs above the Rheidol valley to Aberystwyth, the first excursionists were arriving. Behind us a fat woman

in a black shawl addressed her daughter in rapid melodious Welsh without ceasing. Her voice had the music of the waters in it, and was not unpleasant accompaniment to the valley stretches that opened out widely before us as the train slowly circled the mountainside. Immediately below the single track, the land fell away sheer to wood and rocks hanging above the farms and the windings of the river and the cornfields, and the pastures with their irregular stone hedges that straggled up the opposite hillsides. A fair and pastoral spot upon that sunny morning to which the grey seaside-resort at the valley's mouth was a little like anti-climax. But a fresh wind blew about the small busy streets, loud at this hour of midday with hearty holiday crowds, and soon upon the heels of a shower the sun was shining again across the blue bay where the white sails skimmed. Aberystwyth has little to attract the visitor but its impressive university upon the edge of the bay, and the ruined castle not far from it on the hill. And there is not now the romance to be found there that a certain Mr. Clarke, touring England and Wales in 1791, met in the Talbot Inn.

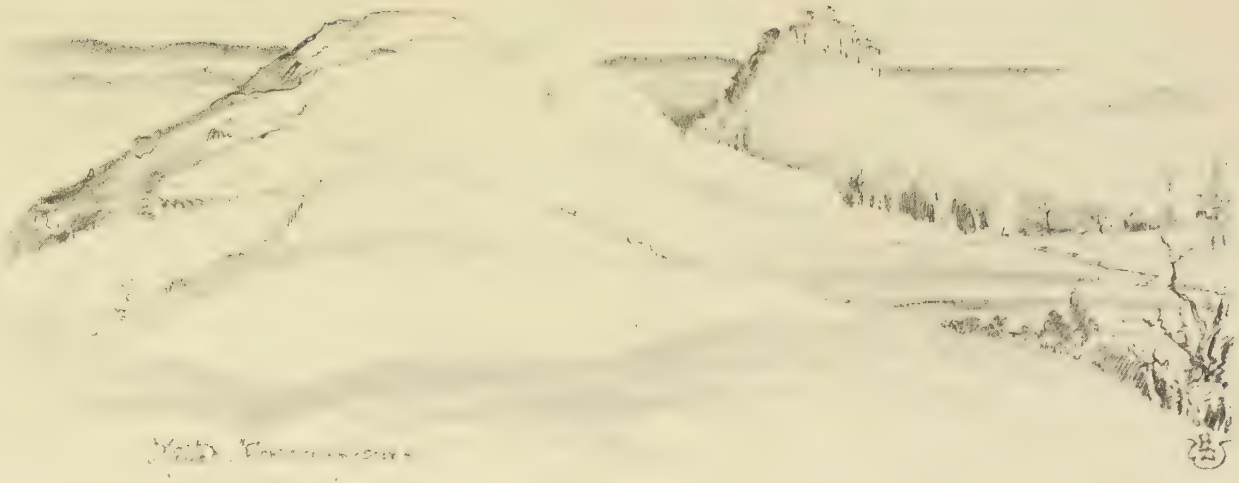
'For here we had,' he writes, 'the first time since we entered Wales, the pleasure of hearing the music of the country in its pure state, from a poor blind female harper. She could speak no English, nor play any English tunes except *Captain Mackintosh* and the *White Cockade*. There was so much native simplicity in her appearance, and the features of sorrow were so visible in her countenance, that no one could behold her unmoved. She was led in by the waiter, dressed after the style of her countrywomen, in a coarse woollen gown, and a hat of black beaver. She had seated herself in a corner of the room, and by an involuntary motion, I drew my chair close to hers. A predilection for Welsh music, would alone have disposed me to listen to the harp; but our blind minstrel, with her untaught harmony, called forth all our admiration, and attention became the tribute of pity. When she touched the strings, she dis-

played all the execution and taste of the most refined master. Her mode of fingering was graceful, light and elegant ; her cadences inexpressibly sweet. We had never before heard such tones from the harp ; she ran through all the mazes of Welsh harmony, and delighted us with the songs of the bards of old. She seemed to celebrate the days of her forefathers, and fancy led me to interpret the tenor of her melody. It sung the fall of Llewelyn and broke forth in a rapid tumultuous movement, expressive of the battles he had fought, and the laurels he had won. All at once she changed the strain ; the movement became slow, soft and melancholy—it was a dirge for the memory of the slaughtered bards, the departed poets of other times. . . .'

In the rainy dusk we took train for Tregaron in the south. Beside us in the stuffy carriage sat two old-fashioned little girls poring over an old scrap-book. Their ripples of laughter and intense interest in the ancient thing were as sunshine at the end of the day, and there was added interest when the train was held up for a further ten minutes while two other little girls, who had been placed in the guard's care, were sought and their comfort assured. At last we started, rather like a family party, travelling slowly into a desolate district inland round the hills to the sweet vale of Ystwyth, similar to Rheidol but a little wider and less populated. On that evening we were not aware that the rain and premeditated plans prevented our seeing the site of the great monastery of Strata Florida, which was the Westminster Abbey of Wales. It lies upon a wild moorland, in desolate country, not far from the railway, and close beside bogs rich in peat but dangerous for the stranger. Leland thus speaks of Ystradfflur or Strata Florida : ' Strateflere is set round about with montanes not far distant, except on the west parte, where Diffrin Tyve is. Many hilles therabout hath beene well woddid, as evidently by old

rotes apperith, but now in them is almoſt no woode—the causes be these. Firſt, the wood cut down was never copisid, and this hath beene a great cause of deſtruction of wood thorough Wales. Secondly, after cutting down of woodys, the gottys hath so bytten the young spring that it never grew but lyke shrubbes. Thirddely, men for the monys deſtroied the great woddis that thei should not harborow theves.' Here of old were brought to be buried 'kings, saints and mitred abbots' and to lie beneath a yew tree the greateſt of all Welsh poets, Dafyyd Ab Gwlym, contemporary of Chaucer, and a highly-romantic figure who wrote many sweet songs.

Set between the hills beside the river and bog, grey little Tregaron does not suggeſt its height of 560 feet above the level of the sea. As we walked down to the quiet empty square we knew we had crossed the border into primitive Wales. Curious were the looks caſt upon us, and foreign and ſtrange the atmosphere of this auſterely-picturesque place that suggeſted a hard-won, meagre prosperity, and a reticence that jealously guards its own. Tregaron is more like a village in southern Ireland than Wales, and the great bog beside it, seven miles long, which provides the village with fuel and the sportsmen with snipe and grouse and teal, adds to the illusion. It did not appear to resemble 'an Andalusian village overhung by its sierra,' which was Borrow's impression of the spot as he approached it by moonlight. Though doubtless many Spanish, Irish and Welsh villages are alike in their indifference to the graces of life, in their tenacity to primitive habits and ideas, in their laziness and carelessness. Tregaron is not without hiſtorical intereſt. It is the birthplace of one Twm Shone Catti, a picturesque figure of the seventeenth century, whose pranks and charm resembled those of Tyl Owlglass, or our own Robin Hood. He was the



MEIFOD: CENTRAL WALES.

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illegitimate son of a baron, but knew only a peasant's life until his exploits and skill as thief and rogue brought him riches and, more important, the power that in his day accompanied wealth. By its means and his own native wit and charm he married a fine lady, became Justice of the Peace, and legend has it even Mayor of Brecon. He was very clever at catching rogues (naturally), just and generous-hearted, as well as something of a poet, so that one so romantically gifted is well deserving of a place in legend. He must have lent colour to this grey and primitive little town, where to-day few visitors come, and all outside influences percolate through but slowly. This evening it did not suggest hospitality, and there was little enough accommodation to choose from, since most of the inns presented the same faded and uninviting exterior. We entered the ' Ivy Bush ' to investigate, and at once our fears vanished and our spirits rose. Within an enormous chimney-piece, black with age and topped with chintz and brass and flowers, glowed a great fire that would have cheered the most melancholy. The deep settles and the polished gate-leg table with its bowl of sweet peas reflected its light, and we smiled hopefully and meaningly to each other as a stout smiling woman crossed the stone flags to our service. The ale was good and silky, but alas, there was not room for us to stay. But the warmth of her bright and kindly personality, nevertheless, was with us as we followed her recommendations and sought elsewhere. We were received in a poor little house, which is typical, I should imagine, of South Wales. The linoleum was worn, the tablecloth patched and discoloured by age, the furniture sparse and ugly. They do not appear to miss the sweet unessentials of life whose days are bounded by toil, by a limited education, and the habits of their fathers.

But, if there was no grace of setting or manners, there was grace of heart, without which the former are mere superficialities. The girl wife and her flapper sister who attended us wore clogs and shapeless garments, and their movements were ungainly and noisy, and there appeared to be years of progress between them and the London girl. But their voices were low and sweet, expressive of gentleness within. As we sat upon the stiff upholstery in the parlour after the frugal supper, frugal not by design but because they lived thus, we heard through the thin wooden walls the two voices raised timidly but sweetly in practise of the Sunday hymns. It was no rehearsal of duty but of love, and was another instance of our discovery that the piety of the Welsh is not always convenient hypocrisy, as so many of her sons would have us believe, but part of the texture of their lives.

As we passed on next morning, discussing the stupidity (or generosity) of simple poor people who fear to charge the stranger too heavily, the landlady of the ' Ivy Bush ' came out into the road with both hands extended. Her concern for our night's comfort was perfectly sincere, and her godspeed restored the original fervour to that simple phrase of leave-taking. With a backward glance at the fine embattled church tower, we set our faces southward to ' a place of old renown,' Llanddewi Brefi, from whence we should take the mountain road to the village of Farmers and the town of Lampeter. The ancient village, four miles beside pasture, river and hillside from Tregaron, was a cluster of grey houses and cots set beside a noble church, whose steeple was loud with the crying of rooks. A stream from the mountains babbled through its picturesque byways, where gaunt women in shawls lingered to observe us as they carried their pails or their market-baskets. The heavy boughs of summer leaned over the flint walls, and the shifting lights of a

cloudy morning upon the mountainside made a background of pearl for the vague grey of hovel and vane and steeple. The place wore a fascinating goblin look and an air of withdrawal from the world and the passage of time, even more than Tregaron. In the fifth century it was the scene of a great theological controversy, and according to folklore also witnessed, in the dim past of legend, the death of a great humped ox of the team of Hu Gadarn. This romantic figure, who was worshipped as a god after his death, and is the Odin of Scandinavia and the Heus of Germany, was a natural king among men in Eastern Europe, who taught the people how to emerge from savagery into happy productivity, and when overpopulation drove them eastward, led them to the wild and empty lands of Britain, where they might employ their arts of husbandry to the same useful ends. One of his oxen became detached from the team through a battle with crocodiles, and wandered at large until it came to the glen where Llanddewi Brefi now stands. Here it pined and died, giving probably by its death-bellowings the name to the village, since Bref in Cymric means 'a great bellowing.' It is said that a very long time ago the horns, of an enormous size, were to be seen in the church.

It was a lonely road that went over the flanks of the mountains, where the herbage was scant for the few nibbling sheep, and no tree broke the bleak expanse except here and there an ancient thorn by a broken gate. We passed a dour shepherd, with face like a gargoyle, and glimpsed at a twist of the path a distant tarn, a steely jewel set in a purple cup. The wind rose, and led a troop of cloud shadows over the slopes, that here were like fold upon fold of lonely hills rather than the mountains that the map denoted. The billowing clouds rose like castles in the sky, with wide blue highways running from horizon to horizon. It was very solitary

and silent, but by noon the road curved round above a pleasant valley where the white farms smiled up from the pastures, and where brambles and wild flowers were tangled in the long grass beneath spreading elms and oaks. Here the land is rich in ancient camps and sepulchral stones, for close by was the Roman town of Loventium. The old lane that runs up over the farther hills, dead straight for a mile or so, is the Roman highway of the Sarn Helen, the fragments of which may be met here and there all over Wales. Helen was the daughter of King Coel of Wales, and was wooed and won by an Emperor of Rome when he visited Britain. It is told in the Mabinogion how she asked for three castles to be built for her, and highways linking one castle with another. 'And the roads were made. She was sprung from a native of this island, and the men of this island of Britain would not have made these great roads for any save her.' It is said that a farmhouse exists still near here whose walls are fifteen feet thick and bear upon them the date 1080.

Our luncheon room was fair with waving ash boughs and loud with an orchestra of blackbirds and farmyard cries, for it was set in a barn that had but a roof and supports, though many flowers were there to grace our table, bracken for a couch with a stout roller at the back, and a pleasant view of the hillside in the sun, glinting with rivulets and domestic with grazing kine. The geese cackled loudly from behind an imprisoning wicket, the pigs grunted in the sty, a horse neighed and was answered by the bark of a dog. In the spaces of their silence a blackbird trilled on a branch above us, giving expression to our content and the pastoral scene. There was a strong sense of remoteness from the outer world, for Cardiganshire, for all its areas of fertility and prosperity, is still one of the most primitive counties in Great

Britain. Ringed in by the mountains, and deficient in railways, with no port of any consequence upon its forty-miles coastline, how should it appear otherwise? Anglers are about the only tourists, and thus cut off by geographical conditions from the rest of the world, the people retain here and there an almost savage simplicity and charm. A hundred years ago, the only post-chaises in the county were at Aberystwyth and the Hafod Arms, and a letter took two days to pass from Hafod to Cardigan, a distance of only forty miles.

We slept as the sun climbed high and over, and were well-refreshed to enter the typical little Welsh town of Lampeter, down in the valley, in the late afternoon. I remember it as a busy place where we had some difficulty in discovering our native tongue, as a town where the older women still wore the long full skirts and large hats of many years ago, where the motor car was rarely seen. The streets upon this market day were filled instead with sturdy brown cobs, buggies, traps and wagonettes. I remember how often in our ' pub crawl ' (the reader will forgive this vulgar designation of one of the best means of obtaining local colour) we encountered the proverbial threepenny-bit, and the rows of jugs of all colours and sizes upon the counters that were replenished from the casks in the kitchen as often as required. In an inn in an alley we met a brigand of a publican by whom we were suitably impressed, and a farmer's argument conducted in rapid, musical Welsh, that almost became a drama. These things impressed us, I fear, more than the theological college for which the town is famous. But we were not alone in our discovery of much to talk about in Lampeter that day, for from the stares and smiles of the yokels and girls it was obvious that Lampeter was also impressed by *us*. I gathered that ' hikers ' are not much seen in Lampeter, and that never before had a female

'hiker' appeared before them attired thus immodestly in breeches. The interior of the hotel, where we took tea, did not suggest either excessive cleanliness or comfort or welcome, and we had not yet learned that these things are seldom met in a Welsh hotel. Beneath a ruddy sunset sky we took the 'bus to the village of Newquay upon the coast, in company with several plump women, and hatchet-faced men. A bright-eyed woman in a corner drew my attention, not for her old-fashioned hat with its great wreath of daisies, her round rosy face, typically Welsh, above the tight black costume, but for the tiny oak spray she carried in her hand, which she was careful not to damage as she stepped heavily and clumsily down at her destination. Why an oak spray? Surely in these days hardly for a charm? The country 'bus travelled far too swiftly that summer evening, lurching and bumping up and down the little hills and sharply round the narrow lanes at about twenty miles an hour. Rather would we have wandered at our leisure through that sweet vale of Aeron, where the tall hedgerows were fragrant with honeysuckle and briar, and the corn high in the meadows, and all that fair rich river-country smiling with prosperity and peace. We passed flowery white cottages, the lattices swinging wide under the thatch, the gardens heavily fragrant with stock, peonies, pansies, phlox and mignonette; heard the babbling of garrulous water or the thrush's song when the 'bus stopped by a farm lane or at the cross roads. Above the woods on the left bank the sunset burned in ardent summer beauty, gilding the pools and possessing our thoughts with its splendour.

It grew dark as we travelled. Soon the trees were but silhouettes upon the green sky, hushed of bird song, and motionless. The head-lights discovered a new beauty in thicket and hedge, and the road dipped suddenly to

reveal the long dark arm of the bay with the lights on the farther shore winking like gems in a crown. After a long time of shaking and bumping, we came suddenly to a place of sea-wind and white walls, of flowers and black darkness, and little steep streets where the sound of singing and laughter lifted above the sound of the sea. Prosaic indeed is he of soul whose senses do not lift above the body's weariness, upon arrival in an unknown flowery village by the sea on a scented summer night. We climbed the dark alleys and peered down the lanes, and entered the lamplit hall of the old-fashioned Queen's Hotel, that hangs among leafy boughs immediately above the bay. But there was not room there. We sought hurriedly, for the hour was late. Eventually we were received in a family hotel where the friendliness was apparent, but where the familiar signs of the worn linoleum and the patched tablecloths, the unclean bed-linen, the strong black tea which was served with the cold mutton as a matter of course, proclaimed that carelessness which we now recognised as the distinctive feature of Welsh 'service.' We sat down to supper with an uncouth Welshman of flashy appearance, whose accent was surprisingly unlike his table manners. It was difficult to eat to the accompaniment of his rattling knife and fork and vulgar chewing. He suggested every kind of coarseness, which went oddly with his melodious voice and perfect accent. He appeared characteristic of this country that is rough and uncivilised from ignorance, and is still simple and unspoiled enough to give freely of kindness to the stranger. It became increasingly plain to us that the Welsh are largely creatures of instincts, good and bad, with the charm as well as the cunning of animals and children. They have not bothered to acquire that restraint (a growth of culture), which can stem the flow of the milk of human kindness, as well as control temper

and direct crude ways of living into something of meaning and grace. For though civilisation destroys coarseness, it destroys simplicity, its natural concomitant, also. Its complicated machinery exists for the mass as well as the man, who must use the various arts of hypocrisy it offers for his self-assertion and protection. A civilised man may not often be himself, but the pattern that his particular section of civilisation has stamped upon him. Then is he intelligent and strong indeed who is able to withstand the powerful influences about him, to watch with understanding their effect upon others, and select from them only those that shall not touch the good in him whilst transmuting or destroying the bad. Hence, the kindly simplicity of the folk we moved among on that western seaboard is as much matter for grateful record as their rough ways of maintaining life are matter for criticism.

Newquay in the clear sunlight of early morning proved to be an unspoiled village well-deserving of the abused adjective 'picturesque.' There was not over-abundance of thatch and roses to give the white cottages on the terraces above the bay that tiresome picture-postcard effect. The combination of small golden beach, curving quay and low green cliff was too sturdy to be pretty ; and it was evident that, although well-known to a few holiday-makers, most of whom at this early hour were carrying mackerel home for breakfast, Newquay had not yet become a beauty-spot spoiled by the bungalow, the tea-garden and the charabanc. This is not likely to happen yet, for the branch railway is distant at Aberaeron, and the big towns are sufficiently far away. The list of Tolls and Dues above the harbour-master's office on the quay provided speculation. It puzzled us to discover why the toll upon a mahogany dining-table was one-and-six, but upon a card-table two shillings, while a plough was

priced at a mere sixpence. A coffin cost two shillings to land, likewise a horse, but a bath-chair only a shilling. The stupendous charge of five shillings was asked for a barrel-organ, and one whole pound for a large organ, but you could land a fox for fourpence, a ham or a box of prunes for twopence, a hundredweight of treacle or a hundred eggs for three-halfpence, while a bushel of grass seeds would cost you only a penny.

After days of tramping it was good to climb to the warm rocks at the end of the quay and lie there close to the blue water. It was an idyllic morning, warm and calm, and perfect for idling. Near by, the sails of the fishing smacks flapped musically in the breeze, and small boys pulled their craft furiously over the dancing waves. One day I will take a house whose windows overlook some small, sheltered harbour. I shall learn much, but, more important, I shall never be bored. And open to the clean influences of the wind and water and sky, the flight of gulls and the lines of lovingly-builded ships, I shall recover, I hope, a little of that simplicity I have mentioned, which life in the towns is so potent to destroy, as well as a blithe spirit and a deeper faith in the permanence of the realities.

Towards noon we reluctantly and slowly enough sauntered out of Newquay, with many a backward glance to the blue water smiling between the boughs in the lanes, and over the white walls on the hills, to the mountains of North Wales beyond, misty on the sky. At intervals we still glimpsed the sea as we walked in the maze of lanes between the coast and the main road, which here goes parallel down to the city of Cardigan, eighteen miles away. Our plan was to look upon the Atlantic once again at the little village of Llangranog, which looked big enough on the map to provide tea, before seeking the main road and the 'bus to Cardigan. It was a longer way than we had

thought, and we were very hot and tired and dusty, and not in the best of tempers, as we followed round the hill-side of rock up the long glen that discloses at last the white houses of Llangranog, built on either side of a stream which rushes to the smallest of beaches set between great bastions of cliff. It was curiously attractive, or rather would have been at any other time than upon a drowsy August afternoon, when the hot stones were covered with excursionists, and dusty cars and picnic-litter scattered on the green under the headland. Though in any case we thought of little then but tea. There appeared one place only where it was to be obtained—a small shop near the inn, where we squeezed into an already-overcrowded tiny room, and sank upon the only available bench in the corner, hot and self-conscious under the eyes of large and lusty Welsh families. A large table under the window still awaited ownership. The plates of cold meat and great hunks of bread and plum cake suggested a party of 'beanfeasters,' so that with astonishment we watched a party of a dozen girls troop in, well-dressed but very broad of back and clumsy of movement, typical flappers of the West. At any other time the hearty enjoyment they displayed over their food and the occasion would have been matter for pleasure, but to-day it was unbearable. We gulped the remaining contents of the thick cups and stumbled out into the air.

There was the golden tranquillity of a perfect summer evening as we climbed the lane out of Llangranog, where none walked now and the sounds from the bay came but faintly. The air shimmered with light, and the face of the fair earth around us was like an illuminated page, where every colour glowed freshly-painted. There was that look upon all things—upon the sapphire cup of the sea far below, upon the edge of emerald field, upon the

blackbird in the tree and the ſtainless sky spread over—that is like rapture in the eyes of contented love. As youth in firſt love is lifted up from common men and wears upon his brow the seal of wonder for all to see, so the earth upon that evening was not the place where we had our daily being, but a kingdom newly-discovered, with the bloom of the love of Him who made it fresh upon its blue waters and singing ſtreams, green branches and sweet air. A young earth, an adorable and adoring earth, made for the gods of men. At the main road the mundane faſt was forced upon us that we had loſt the laſt 'bus. We were not diſturbed, falling back upon our usual philosophy that 'something always turns up upon the road.' We entered a roadside inn to discuss the position, and there above the old settles met again for the firſt time since childhood those old pictures on rollers of brave soldier and sailor sons returning from, or departing to, the wars, with weeping or laughing women and children at their skirts, suitably in the foreground. In the firſt the sailor was ruddy and the woman young and fair as they bade farewell by the roses at the cottage door; in the second the wanderer had returned bearded and bronzed, with parrot in hand, and was tip-toeing artfully up to the rocking chair where his old mother slept, fearing to shock her with too sudden a delight. What a picture of simplicity and content they presented, where life offered no complication and perplexities, but behaved according to the copy-books, rather than with the perversity familiar to us all. There was also the Relief of Ladysmith and other recolleſtions of the Boer War, that were refreshing after long-suffering acquaintance with the Monarch of the Glen and the plump and placid females of Marcus Stone. After long draughts of ginger-beer and ale, we marched ſteadily along the ſtraight road enquiring for rooms at the next inn, two miles farther on. The requeſt was

treated as a huge joke. 'Rooms? *Rooms?* Did you say *Rooms?*' The dirty, fat landlady, hands on hips, only stopped surveying the poor fools before her to waddle into the back parlour and share the fun with some company assembled there. Coldly polite, we enquired for a conveyance, but learned there was no likelihood of obtaining any kind of vehicle at this hour between there and Cardigan, nor much chance of accommodation, except at Aberporth on the coast, two miles off the road some distance up. We guessed it hopeless to try anywhere on the coast, and decided to hope for a lift. The sun sank, a rosy circle over the sea's horizon, and the golden evening waned. The road ran wide and straight through the solitude like a band of dully-shining steel, high above Cardigan Bay, which now took on the mysterious and splendid purple of the seas of legend. It was easy at this hour to imagine beneath those mysterious waters the buried city of Manina set in the midst of a once-fertile plain and populous district, a city 'matchless for its strength, its extent and antiquity, now sunk in the fathomless deep.' Others were Pendamon and Almuda, that had a succession of fifteen chiefs, and were inundated in the fifteenth century. One would like to believe the sea walls and causeways that are exposed at various points at low tide to be the highways of the buried cities, but authority points out that they are but natural reefs.

The cornfields now gave place to heath and common, with distant views of the mountains, wild under the fiery clouds of afterglow, which spread and lengthened until they were like the flying manes of great stallions, snorting over a vast heaven of ultramarine, deepening rapidly to indigo. They passed, and left the east clear and calm. The moon rose, sharp and bright, a sickle leaning on the last cloud, while still the bay and the sky above it were

crimson with the smouldering of the vanished sun. Beneath that stupendous pageantry and in the pure cold air of approaching night, we forgot the little perplexities of the moment. We were spectators upon an important occasion, the Holytide of Evening, sumptuous with colour and pomp and ceremony, that sternly forbade petty complaint. At intervals a car darted up the steel ribbon, shot past before we could deter it and disappeared into the clear distance. We passed a group of cottages, dark and silent and obviously too poor to offer us shelter, then a bleak and lonely Capel, and again wide fields where the white mist drifted, waist-high. The bay grew dusky with twilight, sobering quickly to darkness; the stars opened faint eyes above, and it was not easy to see what lay ahead. We were very tired now, and cold and hungry, and one of us almost too footsore to walk, so that it was necessary now and then to rest in the long grass by the roadside. Truly, gipsying is not all fun and romance. Reluctantly, we bade our sister the moon good-evening and our brother the sun good-night. At nine-thirty a light burning dimly in a little post-office shone through the darkness, and with sudden hope we knocked. Three women appeared at the door at once, their voices warm with sympathy and anxiety to help. As they could do nothing practical for us they suggested we should try Miss E——'s, near the Capel, who 'would do anything for anybody, and would be only too pleased, they were sure!' We marched on almost gaily, hysterical with relief, forgetting fatigue and cold, and entered the wrong gate in the dark, where an old witch of a woman met us at the back-door with a candle. But Miss E—— was found at last, and the welcome light of her kitchen fire glowing through the panes. Unfortunately she could speak no English, and we could speak no Welsh except good-morning and good-night, so that we mistook the

natural fluster of an old woman for suspicion. She disappeared to talk with someone within, and soon reappeared with a smiling young housewife who drew us in at once. We shall not forget you, Miss E——, or the kind couple you live with in that large ugly house at Blaengnerch upon the Cardigan road. For you are of that small and goodly band of Samaritans of whom the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, for whom the stranger out of the night, whatever his station and condition, his origin or destination, is the honoured guest. The armchairs were pulled to the great fire in the sitting-room, a bowl of warm water and fresh towels brought for the aching feet, a fresh tablecloth brought from the linen chest, a new loaf from the cupboard. I write of you tenderly, seeing again in memory your rough hands folded over the blue gown, the shyness twinkling in your old eyes as you ran out to the back kitchen because you could speak no English. A magnificent carved oak sideboard ran the full length of the room, which reflected every flame from the great old fireplace where the black pot swung, and from whence now appeared the eggs, to be eaten with bread and butter, jam, and apple tart and cream—the full contents of the larder. After supper a young husband appeared from the garage he kept across the way. He was a beetle-browed, fierce-eyed Welshman enough, but looks can be very deceptive, and we did not meet upon all that walk (except Farmer Jones and his wife, of whom more hereafter) a gentler, happier or more kindly couple.

After the large and daintily-served breakfast next morning, there was difficulty over the bill. Miss E—— had no idea of what to charge. She held up her hands in expressive bewilderment, confessing in voluble Welsh she ' had never done it before, and didn't know what to say ! ' We discussed it privately and offered her ten

shillings. At once she thrust it back, protesting; the young man translated, 'Too much! Far too much! Why of course too much!' She would accept no more than six shillings, and so with bright smiles and hearty handshakes and good wishes all round we set out into the sunshine for Aberporth, where we would lounge a brief time before taking the 'bus to Cardigan. The birds sang sweetly in the lanes there that happy summer morning, and never any village presented more contented picture. All was very right with the world in that hour when our hearts were especially warm to our fellow men, and conscious of glowing good health and not a care in the world. Beneath low grassy cliffs the satin sea was plucked with threads of green, a barefoot child ran singing down to the shore, a lark rose above. The pleasant smell of breakfast bacon and ripples of laughter were caught from cottage casements as we passed, and all heard and visible life testified emphatically to the fact that the world is a place for joy on a crisp summer morning!

Expecting an impressive city, we were disappointed in the market town of Cardigan upon that famous salmon river, the Teifi. In the sleepy airs of early morning, it was not yet awake, but by noon the small shops and one long street were hardly busier. This clean, retiring and picturesque little place of three thousand souls, with the atmosphere and appearance of a large village, appeared to take life very easily. It has a good hotel, the 'Lion,' though we would not have exchanged its comfortable exterior for Miss E——'s kitchen fireside. The ancient bridge with its five stone arches over the river was once the scene of many battles, the most calamitous of which was between the Welsh and the English in 1135, when the English were defeated by the breaking of the bridge and there were three thousand casualties. Giraldus, the historian, says the river was so filled with corpses that it

was almoſt possible to walk across dry-shod. As usual, there was no bookshop or sign of culture, and no café worthy of the name. In Cardigan in the early eighteenth century the salmon was so abundant and transport so difficult that it coſt no more than twopence or threepence a pound, sometimes falling as low as a penny. It is caught ſtill by the coracle men of the diſtriſt, who, despite the proteſts of anglers whose sport they spoil, pursue their ancient and time-honoured method of earning a living ſtill upon this famous salmon river. In the late afternoon, as we went by road and path up this moſt beautiful valley to Cenarth, we saw them at work. Going upſtream through the meadows with the coracles upon their backs, they looked like huge brown beetles escaped from pantomime into the mild country-side. The coracles are triangular baskets of wicker, large enough to seat a man, varnished with pitch, with twiſted withies faſtened to the seat to serve as a handle, and propelled by paddle. I suppose they are the laſt conneſting link in the British Isles with the ancient Briton, whose primitive craft they so closely resemble. They attain tremendous speed as, without sound, they drift down the faſt-flowing ſtream, allowing the lines to drift silently through the water, and landing at intervals to walk back with their vessels on their backs and begin their favourite ſtretch again. We passed several baskets propped up by the roadside, in the process of drying or of manufaſture or repair, while the modern continuation of this old cuſtom was met in a boy upon a motor-cycle with a shining fifteen-pounder suspended across the handle-bars. We had lingered so long down by the river that it was evening before we reached the bridge at Cenarth Falls, a well-known salmon leap, and a charming peaceful spot in the benign sunshine of the day's end. As we sat upon the old ſtone bridge, by the mountain ash

that leaned to the plunging water and the white farmhouse on the flat yellow rocks, the sound of song drifted from the inn near by. A party of semi-drunken ploughmen and country lads were roaring chanties in Welsh. An intriguing aria, obviously indecent from the tone in which it was delivered and the laughter which followed it, was sung by the leader, and a rousing chorus then came rolling forth with that natural harmony and sweetness peculiar to a race world-famous for its voices. Reluctantly almost, so fair was the spot and so entertaining the sound of the singing across the water, we rose, went on our way, and got lost. After two hours of wandering we reached a bare little town that seemed the uglier and more repelling for the contrast of the valley in which it is set. The children were chasing noisily in clogs up and down its one long street, and the fried-fish-and-chips man crying his wares from his little car. Upon a dubious recommendation of a shop-keeper we sought our hotel. It was the worst we had encountered. No one escorted us up the large bare staircase to the bleak third floor, where we peered in the gathering dusk for the directed rooms. No one came with hot water, fresh towels, or enquiries about food, or expressed the slightest interest in us. The bed-linen was dirty and well-used by several Welsh 'commercials,' the dust thick upon dressing table and mantle, though the blue linen curtains and fresh paint made some attempt at cheerfulness. In response to the angry ringing of the bell, a dishevelled girl came at last, and stared in astonishment at the unheard-of request for hot water, though she was friendly enough when she appeared some time later with it in a pint-pot. Supper, moderately good, was eaten in a dining-room that had not been swept for weeks, but we were glad to find a fire in the large sitting-room. Here two anglers were too engrossed in ruminations over

the day's sport to take any notice of the dusty strangers. Sleep was long in coming, for long after dark the clogs and the hobnails rattled on the pavements, those terrible clogs to which the tender feet of babes become too early accustomed. Brakes and gears and the shrill screams of children mingled and clamoured as though this lost corner were a busy industrial town, instead of a large village, until somewhere at last a clock struck eleven slow chimes, and a sudden hush as of curfew descended, and one could sleep at last.

Llandysil, where we arrived at noon, was a softer spot and a pleasant change, for the one long street is built along the rocky bank of the noisy Teifi, so that a village so situated cannot fail to be picturesque. Here we made acquaintance of another of those kindly Welsh shoemakers, who cheerfully will spend much time and trouble upon the stranger, because 'we are here to help one another.' It was strange how every day we met this phrase upon the lips of shopkeepers and cottagers, uttered not in the oily tone that is anxious to please, but with the simplicity of sincerity. We had merely bought a pair of new shoes, but not only were they stretched and their comfort made certain, our bags stowed away beneath the counter while we lunched, advice given as to the best place for that purpose, and our further route searched for upon the shopkeeper's larger map, but also the clumsy discarded boots were bought willingly and at a reasonable price. I suppose there is foundation for the proverbial rapacity of the Welsh shopkeeper, but the close bargaining must be a private matter among themselves, for it is difficult for the stranger to associate guile with the inoffensive little grocers and haberdashers of the West. Climbing up a steep green hill beyond the village in the hot sunshine of afternoon, we paused to gaze back upon the pretty picture of the

haymakers gathered about their midday meal among the sheaves. The sunbonnets and gowns lay like lazy butterflies in the yellow corn and under the hedges, and the faint sound of laughter rose with the lark's song. It had hardly died, and we had not gone far along the white dusty lane at the top, when a sweet tenor sounded over the hedgerow where a reaper stooped above his work. Land of sun and song and sweet content! It is a foreign land of stone walls and strange hills and streams, where folk move not sluggishly and fatalistically at their labour but with eagerness. They work upon responsive soil, of course, where Nature meets them halfway, and here, remote from the large cities, there is neither excessive inducement to spend or much permeation of that stealthy restlessness that is the beginning of fret as well as of enterprise. After much panting up and down fair hillsides and wandering by twisting brooks in the cool shade, we came to a high road flanked by windy commons, where the distant Carmarthen vans were ranged along the sky, and where the air was fresh and sweet. There was not a sound as we drank tea in a barren field by a tall old pillar, the last surviving stone of a cromlech perhaps, and there were few cottages upon that road until it dropped valleywards at last at Llanpumpsaint, which is in English 'the hamlet of the five saints,' though who these worthy gentlemen were I know not. It is a typical little lost Welsh village, primitive and not unbeautiful, set in the midst of romantic country; in the surrounding hills have been found many Roman remains, the most important of which is a long golden chain of undoubted authenticity, and a milestone. George Borrow stayed a night at the inn upon his tour, and had we known of that fact, or not heard in the distance the approach of the Carmarthen train, we should have stopped for refreshment at 'this good specimen of an ancient Welsh hostelry.'

It is a rich and lovely valley under the close towering hills that the railway penetrates down to Carmarthen. The heavily-timbered hills lean over the river, embracing it in shadow, which here is but an impetuous stream dancing over stones, and there a wide, calm water, sweeping in great curves through the pastures. It is very conscious of its beauty, as it looks up to the stately houses on the hillside that here and there give that gentle touch of intimacy to a noble and satisfying landscape. In the gold-green light of evening it wore a most beautiful allure. We vowed to return to it, as the train drew up by the last green field and slid slowly into Carmarthen, reaching the heart of this small city in a moment. It is a rugged, ugly and noisy town, built steeply upon the cliff above the busy river, with but little evidence left of the Roman occupation or its later history. All that remains of the castle is almost hidden by the gaol, and may be glimpsed, a fragment of once-beautiful wall, among the grey houses high above the riverside. It is one of the last places where the tall Welsh hat was seen, for it has always been a great market centre. As the sun sank we left the warehouses and wharves and the crowd on the bridge absorbed in a race of motor-boats, and ascended to the upper town by those steep grey lanes that give the city its foreign look—as of some decayed town of old France or Spain. The dark old inns were provocative and enticing—for encounter but not for residence—and we passed on to the square, that at this hour was loud with the perambulations of work-free lads and lasses chi-iking each other as they rubbed together in the crowd. It was very quiet by contrast in the high, dignified old street of Georgian houses and trees near the church, where, retiring back in dignity, stands one of the best hotels in South Wales, the 'Ivy Bush.' It was once a private house and the last residence

of Sir Richard Steele, the essayist. From here in his last years he was carried round the town in his chair by two menservants, scattering pennies to the urchins as he went. Here he died in 1729, and was buried in the church amidst great pomp, with the torches of twenty-five attendants flaring above his bier. He wished for no particular inscription upon his stone, trusting rather to the fame of his work to immortalise him. Here, amidst good examples of old Queen Anne furniture, we were glad to renew acquaintance with that perfect and unostentatious service that we had missed so many days. We bathed and dined and rested in a peaceful atmosphere, and felt again civilised, and were enchanted to discover from the long windows of the lounge the sweet valley of Towy sleeping below, breathing quietly under the cloudy moon. A long bar of cloud with a silver hem stretched behind a tall pine, and beside it the pale river curved widely and dimly away into the night. I see now the fair outlines of tree and cloud and water, as I saw them then, and later from the deep bed in the room above, as they dissolved into the intangible pictures of the dreaming mind.

Saturday was market-day, and the narrow hilly streets were irritable with people. The traps and carts of farmers rattled over the bridge and up and down the little hills ; tall old women in voluminous skirts and black shawls with big flat baskets of produce on their arms bawled one to another as they passed on the pavements. The hours dragged hot and slow as we hung about the town, waiting an expected letter ; there was the taste of dust in the mouth and unceasing clamour in the ears. With relief in the early afternoon we sought the little branch train among the busy platforms, and descended very soon after in that quiet, remembered valley again at the wayside station of Bronwyd Arms. Out there was

solitude and peace. A fisherman leaned over the bridge above those brown waters whose gentle flow steadied the fevered mind. Above, the thickly-wooded hills rose to the hot sky, shadowy and inviting. Nothing could be heard but the rustle of birds in the leaves, or the leap of a fish. We studied the map for any place that was quiet and high and remote, but there were so many that decision was not easy. We strolled along by the river idly, met a baker's van from which we purchased a 'bap,' and passed a charming thatched grocer's shop where we obtained food for an evening meal. For the blazing day promised a fine clear night, and, with the rugs we had collected from the railway station, we hoped to sleep out at last upon the hills. A quarter of an hour was spent in difficult conversation with the stout countrywoman at the shop, before she understood just where we wished to go. The village postman joined her, and between them they were able to direct us to our particular choice upon the map, which was anywhere in the lonely hills on the way to Brechfa. We climbed the high, dusty lanes slowly, resting often under the hedges, for it was almost unbearably hot. There had not been a cloud since sunrise, and even on the hills there was little wind. The cattle had sought the shade of the elms and the pools, and the air shimmered dazzlingly over the meadows. We were heavily-loaded also, and very conscious of it as we panted through the glare, penetrating slowly into a land of white farms, gently-undulating hillsides, and streams, a serene and cultivated land, more like pastoral England than wild Wales. We became lost several times in the maze of lanes, but met none of whom to ask the way. The day strode rapidly on, and the sun as it sank nearer the horizon eased a little of its burning power. About four o'clock we came to a place of larches on a steep slope, rare in this rather thinly-wooded region.

There was the loud sound of water, and recognising an ideal situation for a camp we scrambled up among the trees. The ground was very wet there but a path led out to a broken gate and the blue smoke of a household fire. From a grey house in the hollow, that rose in dignity from a tangle of wild beauty, we obtained permission to camp in a high field that was 'dry as a bone,' as well as the gift of four new-laid eggs that we stowed carefully in our pockets. The ground was dry enough, but very hard and bare; and two frisky ponies were unnecessarily curious of our conduct. Also, the only row of trees overhung the ditch rather than the field. Tea was made slowly and with difficulty over a fire of green twigs, and faces and fingers were well-blackened in the process, but the result was unbelievably refreshing after the arduous labours of the hot noon. The sun sank, without pomp or flourish, in a pure sky, leaving a smudge of fire along the horizon, and as quickly as possible the rugs were adapted in every kind of way for the best shelter possible. But lack of trees made the erection of any kind of camp a difficult matter, and the attempt was abandoned at last in favour of a couch in the open field. As the clear green twilight followed the sunset, fresh scents arose from grass and heath and fern, and the calls of birds innumerable sounded more clearly over hill and vale. When these had died there was no sound at all, and there descended then that most beautiful hour of summer evening in the country, when it is neither light nor dark, but dusk hangs rapt and breathless before the suspended veil of night, and all things wear the spell of an enchantment. While J. gathered fresh twigs for the fire, I hastened back along the lane to the last cottage about a quarter-of-a-mile away, for water. A fat sow was being driven home from market and, nearly filling the narrow lane, almost tripped me as I turned a corner, but

at this quiet hour the cottage was reached without further adventure. With a large milk-can brim full I walked slowly back, drinking deeply every moment of that most precious hour, where, far from men and the ways of men, one might recapture the forgotten ecstasy, the sense of power and health, and primitive joy of the first man. It passed, as all high things must pass, to make room for the clamouring things of earth, but it went not quite away. Above the fact that the dew was falling rapidly and heavily upon our picnic meal and all our gear strewn carelessly around, indicating the dubious wisdom of our plans, the consolation of the setting and the hour lingered like a sweet odour. But it was obvious that we should not sleep comfortably in that bare wet field, and that the immediate neighbourhood offered nothing better. Amused at our folly, we packed quickly, and, restored to vigour by the sharp air, entered the lane again and marched south to seek some kindly farmer who would lend a barn. An inn or even a cottage was impossible, for funds were reduced to the small amount to cover the next night's lodging and the railway fare home. We walked unconscious of direction, peering through the falling darkness for the white gates of prosperous farms, for empty cottages, for wayside sheds, for anything with a roof. When night had fallen and we had walked some miles, we found ourselves upon the main road, where the lights of a broken-down 'bus shone gold upon the hedges. We enquired our whereabouts and the possibilities of the district, found the farm recommended, and were pleased by the spruce appearance of the out-buildings, the glow of the kitchen fire through the pane, the trim kitchen garden and the flagged paths. But it was evident that the farmer and his good wife were either visiting friends or the cinema at Carmarthen, and tired of waiting at last, and disappointed, we marched on again.

But there was definite though unconfessed apprehension now, which, nevertheless, was still a small matter beside the pleasure we had in the fresh summer night. The country slept, an owl called, and the air grew colder under the clear stars. But with delight at nine-thirty we saw in the distance the glimmering light from a little shop that had not yet closed its door to custom. The owner directed us without hesitation to the lane by the Capel, at the end of which we should find Farmer Thomas Jones, who 'never refused to help anybody.' We dared not hope, for Farmer Jones might be visiting too. The dog barked as we crossed the yard, and horses neighed in the stables, but there was bright lamplight in the farm kitchen and a man doing accounts at a long refectory table. He accepted us as a matter-of-course and regretted he had nothing better to offer than the barn, and my heart went out to this saviour in clogs and rough clothes that smelled of the stables. A lantern was brought at once, and a jug of water, the ladder was set to the loft, and we climbed in over a great hayrick to the high spaciousness of the barn, warm and sweet with the scent of hay, and fantastic with the shadows of the candlelight on great beam and rafter. How happy we were that sweet, summer night in the soft hay, with the moonlight bright through the half-open door and chinks in the panels, with the pleasant intimate sounds of cattle and ducks, and pigs and horses that conversed with each other at intervals all through the night, no words may tell. No bread tasted sweeter, or coffee more fragrant than that which we consumed amidst hushed laughter by the light of the crooked candle, and never have I known a softer bed. But there was one flaw. All night beneath the head, up in the rafter and deep beneath the straw, the rats and mice scurried and scratched, so that long before dawn the battery of the electric torch

was exhausted, and our laughter had passed to annoyance and from that to weariness and a philosophic content, so that we slept at last uncaring. In earthly joys there must always be a flaw, lest we grow too careless of our gifts and privileges, or blunted and unappreciative by too much familiarity with the beautiful and perfect. Was it not so on those tender nights of early summer in the Surrey hills when, beneath the pines, I had lain amidst the heather and watched the sickle moon slip into the cradle of some distant larch or fir, and heard the earth settle herself for sleep? For even as I watched and learned and was made wise, I could not forget the ache of the cold in the despicable limbs that refused to obey the strong and joyful spirit. Those happy hours came back in memory, as the rats prevented sleep now in the warm straw of the barn. There had been a night upon the pine needles in the woods above Peaslake, not far above the cottage roofs, when the quiet hours were regulated by the chiming church clock, and little timid things made tiny sounds upon the great silence as they darted lightly through the ferns. Some woods take on an evil in the twilight, becoming possessed by an alien spirit that their gentle natures, whose wholesomeness is so apparent by day, are powerless at that hour to repel. It was not so in those high woods upon Pitch Hill, but instead, as the moon rose and the silver light crept slowly and evenly up the rough bark and cast a pale glow upon bracken and grass, they took on an added power, sweetness and dignity. Grave and holy trees they were that night, blessed by the moon, and listening hour by hour and gathering wisdom from some conventicle unheard by mortal ears. Privileged in the silence and the solitude, I knew then the origin of that secret knowledge they seem to hold by day, which mortals long to share and may not, which gives them their calm and

grace, their poise and ſtrength. They partake of it upon the midnight, while we ſleep. I knew then that indeed they are the miniſters of Truth, from whom we may learn much, and was humbled before them and before God, that I had been admitted in the light ſummer night to their ſecret aſſembly. I remembered the pine that had ſheltered and whiſpered all night above a couch in the heather, upon the ſouthern ſlopes of Leith Hill, and ſhall never forget the ſolemnity that entered the air in the hour before the dawn, bidding the whole earth bow down and attend. There was no viſible diſplay or ſplendour, ſave where the morning-ſtar grew brighter and more ardent in the eaſt, but an expectancy of high import that was ſenſed rather than ſeen. It was the moment before the lifting of the veil of day, uſhered in with that high emprise upon this ordinary morning as upon the firſt dawn. Unlike man in his efforts and tasks, the great laws never relax or pale from their firſt ſtrong ſplendours, for they are immutable and eternal, and the univerſe ſhall fall aſunder when they wane a hairsbreadth. We dared not ſpeak in that hour, but watched breathleſs as the ſcroll lifted, every ſenſe ſtraining to learn what was about to be made known. I knew the ſecret then, but I do not know it now, as I knew it not the next moment, for the mind may not retain and certainly never express what the ſpirit learns in those brief flaſhes of illumination. The grey light ſpread ſlowly over the earth, the ſtar paled, and ſoon there was that flush beneath it in the eaſt that heralded the ſun. The grave hour was paſt, the high feſtival over, and the mortal eyes gazed around through the gathering light to the ſcene of its conſummation, but ſaw only the heavy miſt on the bracken ſparkling into jewels, the outlines of the trees where the birds were twittering their firſt ſleepy matins, and the ſhell-pink clouds of early morning,

wearing that beauty of common earth that is familiar to us all. . . . I remembered with joy the very early mornings, the gradual discovery by the light of farms and fields, ponds and hedgerows in the valleys below, the shining purity of the sky, and the blue air when the sun was high above the horizon. In hot summer weather, the weald at that hour under the cloak of the mist would become a bay, with a line of shore where windmills turned and church spires rose, and a vast calm water beyond, where ships hovered. So definite was the illusion it was difficult to realise it was but a picture of the mist. After several miles of walking through the dewy lanes of an awakened, bird-loud world, very good was breakfast at the inn, with many cups of coffee and many cigarettes, and that bliss of content that only vagabonds know. The later hours were somewhat dull by contrast, also by artistic necessity. One would not have it otherwise, but recognise with gratitude the fastidiousness of Nature who keeps her best hours separate and apart. . . .

At four there was the beginning of clamour about the farm. The cock crowed and the geese cackled, the horses neighed more loudly and the cattle became restive in their stalls. When it was quite light a woman in clogs and rough clothes ascended to the loft for the tub of mush for the pigs, and we took this as a signal to leave. At the sight of our business-like attitude upon her re-appearance she protested at once :

' Oh, no ! Indeed no ! You go in and sit by the fire until breakfast is ready. You must not dream of going without breakfast ! I shall be very cross. Please no ! ' She hurried away to milk the cows, and pleased and stiff we descended to the yard. It was mysterious with a delicate beauty there at that early hour. A row of tall trees (elms, I think they were) ringed a long pool where the cattle, brown and white and black, were coming down

to drink. Beyond, the hills fell sharply away to what appeared to be a deep valley drowned in mist. A great fire blazed in the long kitchen, where the hams swung from the beams, and where was that simple farmhouse comfort that can have changed but little through the centuries. We drowsed in the settle, and when we went to wash in the tin bucket provided at the doorstep, the sun was up, a red ball rising rapidly and conquering the mist and bringing colour to the fair green world. It promised a fair Sabbath morning. At eight o'clock breakfast was ready, not at the long table with the farmer and his wife, but, because we were guests, in the little parlour beside the dairy. The best china was upon the table, the best silk tea-cosy, and a posy of flowers. There were slices of Welsh ham (that rather over-rated product which is somewhat coarse and strong), brown eggs, white home-baked bread and sultana bread, fresh farm butter, preserves and fruit. The morning sun shone upon the old portraits and samplers on the walls, and the highly-polished furniture. Surveying the scene and reflecting upon our presence there, we were touched to tears. For were we not unknown tramps who had slept in the barn, dusty, shabby with many days upon the road, dependent upon rustic generosity? Yet they considered the best they had hardly good enough for us, and many times the smiling woman knocked at the door with the offer of more eggs or tea, rendering service with that ease and dignity that made it seem the most natural thing in the world, forbidding comment or vulgar display of gratitude. It was evidently a comfortable rather than a superlatively-prosperous farmhouse, where this hard-working couple and their one hired man were employed from dawn to sunset. One could not fail to respect at first glance the gentle bearing of this stocky, curly-haired little man with the keen eyes, or his auburn-

haired young wife with her work-coarsened hands and cheerful smile. Their eyes told of wholesome living and content with the earth and its produce, and their bearing on this Sunday morning of an easy piety that shaped the tenor of their lives to unity and repose. Their pleasures were limited to the newspaper and the Capel, and the visits of friends, but mostly it appeared they drew their satisfaction as well as their daily bread from long and daily contact with the living earth and the beasts they loved. Affection and pride shone warmly from the farmer's eyes as he talked of his cattle, especially of the white cow, Gwili Purity, who had won for him several prizes and was a 'most kind and gentle beast.' Long hours of work and hardship and lack of mental stimuli had not had their usual way with them, for their content was not the stolid apathy of the English peasant, and their judgment and humour were shrewder than that of many a townsman. Our respect and liking for the Celt grew thus day by day, for it was evident that the same strains prevail as in the days when Giraldus wrote of them:

> 'These people being of a sharp and acute intellect, and gifted with a rich and powerful understanding, excel in whatever studies they pursue, and are more quick and cunning than the other inhabitants of a western clime. . . . They consider liberality and hospitality among the first virtues. So much does hospitality here rejoice in communication, that it is neither offered nor requested by travellers, who, on entering any house, only deliver up their arms. . . .'

Borrow referred to them as 'the noble, simple Welsh,' though doubtless we were fortunate in meeting only those kindly folk who thus confirmed the impressions of old travellers, a people whom circumstance and environment had left free to display their natural gifts. Doubt-

less we should have returned with a different story from the mining districts, where is every excuse for viciousness, or from the north of the country where there is not. For there seems little reason for the cunning and the cringing, the greed, the crudity and untrustworthiness that is so frequently met there, unless that wild mountainous district, definitely evil in places, has fashioned man to its own pattern; or that the commercialising influence of the tourist has corrupted a people that were once as simple and courteous as the folk of the south. . . . All that long idyllic summer day was spent down in the meadow by the Gwili brook. There we drowsed and dreamed and lunched, washed our travel-stained clothes in the brook and dried them on branches in the sun; there we made tea over the twig fire, and lulled by the chattering of the water over the stones, and the soft plunging of the cascades in the hollows, nodded over the pages of Montaigne. A ring of larches flecked the grass where we lay with quivering light and shade, and as the day progressed and the heat became intense, the cattle moved closer to it, but shyly, staring solemnly at the trespassers from their distance. But shyest of all was Gwili Purity, with her soft brown eyes and gentle movements, and her we should have welcomed to our Arcady most of all. None passed along the lane above all day; nothing was heard but the singing of the birds and the water, and the light breeze that stirred very faintly at intervals in the boughs above. The hours wheeled over like a slow and joyous music, the andante in the symphony of summer. I have not known many sweeter days, nor wish to, lest their innocence and charm be marred by too frequent repetition. In the late afternoon a cry sounded from the field below, and the farmer came halloing with the brown dog to call the cattle home. We went with him, our very good friend who had

invited us to ſtay another night, not in the barn, but in decent beds within. After the milking, we watched the day drowse towards its end over the trees by the long pool, the colours blur and fade a little, and the animals turn contentedly among the ſtraw, while the beſt clothes were donned within and the farm left ſtraight before leaving for the evening service. We responded with alacrity to the invitation to attend a Welsh service, and truly in a mood for worship to the Lord of the fair green earth, paced slowly across the fields in the clear evening sunlight to the lonely Capel set in their midſt. For in this paſtoral country the Capel does not always adjoin a village, but ſtands in a solitary place where it may beſt serve the scattered farms and cottages and hamlets. It was a tiny red-brick place, drowsy and warm with summer fragrance. The music from the little organ ſtole softly through the air above the murmuring of a small congregation, who took its worship simply, without undue pomp or affectation. To the ſtranger from the English cities and English villages, where religion is moſtly a thing for Sundays and church-going a meaningless convention, the occasion smote almoſt with shock, for here it was a living thing, refreshing in its simplicity and sincerity. There was piety as well as love of music in the fingers of the young country organiſt, and certainly piety, ſtrong and elemental, in those rich baritone and tenor voices of yeomen and ploughmen lifted to the grand old tune of Aberyſtwyth. I have not heard that old tune since without a leaping of the blood, or failed to feel about me immediately again the warm light of that little Capel in the hills. The sermon, of which we underſtood not a word, was a powerful example of Welsh eloquence, rising and falling in long cadences and maintaining the definite architectural form of Welsh oratory. But I have to confess that after the firſt intereſted quarter

of an hour, sleep endeavoured to have her stealthy way with us. But by constant watchfulness she was defeated at last, though with relief at the end of a long three-quarters-of-an-hour we saw the great Bible close, and rose to attempt the last hymn, strengthened by the fine voice of Farmer Jones, powerful and vibrant beside us. The fires of sunset were in the sky and the air was pure and sweet as we came out blinking into the golden evening; we were silent with the consciousness of a great experience, as we paced slowly back with the farmer and his friends, and escaped at the gate for an hour alone in the green solitude. It was a precious hour of which nothing may be told, save that it was haunted through the dusk by sweet and distant voices lifted in old hymn-tunes, as the youths and girls went home along the lanes—a strange sound to hear upon a Sunday in 1928. The full yellow moon stood over the farm as we returned, entering the lamplight to company and supper. We were asked to come again as a matter of course, but I am not likely to accept. For the long pool with the drinking cattle would never wear that same look of morning innocence again, or the meadows with their wild flowers slope so sweetly to the Gwili brook, and summer appear to bind so closely for her own those wide and rolling pastures with their happy farms and Arcadian content. For it is not places in themselves that have the power to quicken the blood and stir the spirit to response and love, as it is not events. It is the light that is cast upon them, coming from one knows not whence, and quickening them to life and meaning, as beneath the rays of an invisible sun. Then it is that the most insignificant landscape, a word or a glance, a plain face or an everyday matter, becomes mysterious and potent with beauty and truth, but sinks back into negation again when the light is withdrawn. I fear lest the light should not shine again

across those fair Carmarthen hills, that were to me so much more than trees and ſtreams and paſture ; leſt things that were living and lovely, and are immortally so in memory, take on the semblance of imagined fancies and crumble into duſt.

CLOUD SHADOWS

Across the leagues of downland grass
Majestically and slow they pass ;
Their destined passage none shall stem,
And none command or hasten them.

Tower and chariot, pennon, spear,
In serried ranks they draw more near.
Stream the banners bright above
The bay, the mare, the lamb, the dove.

To music of a silent drum
Obedient all they crowd and come,
While sounds the wind in clarion cry
From sunny ramparts in the sky.

As princes, kings and queens they ride,
In splendour, bravery and pride ;
With laughter too for battles won,
Who are the subjects of the sun.

I hear the music in my blood.
It is the same that fire and flood
And birds, and trees, and man and brute
Must march unto till all are mute.

I watch their passage, and I know
That thus majestically and slow,
With courage, dignity and mirth
Should man thus pass across the earth.

I watch and know that here for me
In Nature's gentle pageantry
Serene, untroubled, lovely, kind,
Is lesson to my restless mind.

CHAPTER VIII

SUSSEX

IT is good to open one's eyes from warm and comfortable sleep to the patch of sunlight upon the yellow wall, to see it deepen and grow until it reaches the oak beams, and slips along the sloping floor until soon the little room is full of golden light. The window is supported open by a chair leg, for the inn is very old, and as one reaches an arm to pull the curtain aside, the horses go slowly through the last remnant of the mist for early exercise upon the downs. The chestnut spreads wide, shadowy arms across the brightening east, for it is winter and the branches are bare. Upon one of them perches an early blackbird, singing loudly. The old cross is but a shadow too, until the sun shall reveal fully the outline of that worn but picturesque stump. There is the noise of Philip Bunkle's quick feet upon the stone flags of the tap-room below, as he tidies and sweeps for the day, chops the wood for the fire soon to be lit in the great chimney-piece, and then retires to help prepare a delectable breakfast for his guests that is surprising. Dolly, the maid, knocks with the morning tray, and a freshening wind gathers and blows sweet over Windover, that broad kind hill whose outline is seen above the smithy's shop as one cranes one's neck from the enveloping eiderdown. The January day is full of mild promise. Almost one can smell the sweetness of the pushing buds and growing things in the clear bright air. The sun has pencilled his morning picture of the waving branches of the great tree on the cream cottage wall, as one opens the

door to greet the day, and round little Bunkle himself, in florid jumper and breeches, of ruddy countenance and bird-like eyes, appears with his welcoming smile to bid good-morning.

With diffidence one writes of Alfriston in these days, the little village at the head of the Cuckmere valley in Sussex, four miles from the sea, which the guide-book and the charabanc have made familiar to so many holiday-makers. Timidly one writes of the Market Cross House and its characteristic landlord, of that perfect cook and laughing hostess who was always too busy to appear, gentle Mrs. Bunkle, the best landlady I have ever met. Will the reader tolerate once more a page or two from still another pen? If he is a downland lover he will know the appeal of this country, escaping definition in words or paint, that draws the worshipper again and again in all seasons, when other bits of England just as beautiful and infinitely more unspoiled and unknown, remain to be discovered and enjoyed. If he has stayed at the Market Cross, in those days before the Bunkles gave up their long sojourn there, when there have been but one or two congenial friends to occupy the deep chesterfield by the peat fire at dusk, to munch hot buttered scones, fresh from the oven, by the drawn tea-table, while outside the night draws slowly across the downs; if he has brought appetite to Mrs. Bunkle's roast duck and jugged hare as well as thirst to the good brown ale, if he is quick to sense the free happy atmosphere that circulates about certain families, he will know that I write of important matters. I am sorry they belong to the past. If the reader desires to make further acquaintance with my friends, he will find them at the end of the chapter.

The inn is a little, low, unobtrusive place from the front, in summer almost hidden by the chestnut, but

ALFRISTON.

within you will be shown the six staircases, forty doors and twenty rooms (including the one which Stanton Collins, king of the smugglers, himself occupied), the deep well in the large attic, the accommodating size of the tap-room chimney, which knew the joyful and fearful hide-and-seek of the smugglers in the past. But there is little that comes up from the sea in this neighbourhood nowadays, for the Cuckmere is narrowed to a stream, and the coastguards' vigilance drove the hazardous from the Seaford cliffs long ago. . . . Wandering in the narrow thickets between the downs one may people the twisting paths with crouching horsemen in the secret hollows, well-hidden by the rising shoulders of the hills. There is such a sunken path that climbs from Alfriston to Lullington church, but none walk there now but the shepherd recovering a lamb fallen among the brambles.

There is no constant hot water supply at the Market Cross, and there are but lamps to cast an orange glow as you sink, in slippered ease, into a deep chair at night after a hard day's tramp, and but candles to light you over the creaking boards at night. Returning from the sweet simplicities of the hillside, down the one street of old houses suggestive of the seventeenth century, red-windowed in the dusk, you know that the candlelight above your mirror is the only possible welcome. Later, after dinner, the moonlight floods through the tree and makes of the cross a stark sword to the starry blue above. Beautiful the drifting shadows of the branches over the stones, the line of the crooked houses, and the overhanging gables of the ancient 'Star,' whose sign swings eerily in the wind and whose lantern is lit above the door. Just within is the sanctuary post, past which the fugitive found safety and shelter; this old inn of the pilgrims bears monastic signs beneath the windows and for a corner stone the scarlet gargoyle of a figure-head, which

grins upon you as you come up the street. In winter a great fire splutters and glows in the iron basket on the hearth of the bar, and casts its ruddy light over the blackened beams and settles, and into the shadowy corners. Not so long ago the mistress of the ' Star ' was one Anne Page, who lies now buried in the churchyard. The lounge on the left of the entrance was her kitchen, and from the great iron pot that hung in the chimney-piece, she would ladle bowls of soup for tramps and shepherds and ploughmen, newly come from the cold hillsides and very grateful for these impulses of her kind heart. Truly a sweet Anne Page . . . Down by the church the waters glimmer under the starlight, an owl calls, and receives answer across the valley. Along the footpath to the tiny bridge the alders fling straight naked branches to the stars. A square of light from the local hall and the faint strains of jazz proclaim the dance of the week. It gives no discord, but rather intensifies the greater surrounding peace.

From almost all approaches but the North, when it appears to lack distinction, Alfriston is beautiful and peaceful and satisfying. Either road from Seaford is good, though I prefer the lower, for then one emerges from a sheltering lane to the last spreading waters of the Cuckmere, loud with wild fowl and twitter of birds, and sees framed between the ivied elms, the ' cathedral of the South Downs,' sitting comfortably beyond the green and the willows, and the tiny bridge over the pools. In the spring the apple orchards over the grey walls drift to and fro in pink and white loveliness across the azure sky, the wild cherry blows in the lanes between the downs, and the scent of hawthorn intoxicates as one climbs the slopes. The lambs totter on spindly legs in their first ungainly frolic above you on the hillside pastures, as you bend for wild violets in the hedge, and for that emerald

moss that is found at the base of every tree. In Lullington's deserted churchyard, where ſtands, they say, the ſmalleſt church in England but which is really but the chancel of one long decayed, you may pick snowdrops until you are tired and ſtill there will be ranks of them smiling up at you among the fern. Sometimes in January, drear month in towns, Alfriſton takes on a newer beauty, for the heavy rains of winter may conſpire with the spring tides to swell the many ſtreams, and the village sits then at the head of a vaſt lake where the swans gather from Newhaven. In the clear bright air the wide spaces of the water gleam bluer than the sky, and the day is loud with bird-song in every bush and tree. The fieldfares rush up from the fields in sudden upward showers, a quivering brown spray of wings, very light and graceful. Later comes the yellow flutter of chaffinch wings, like heralds going on before, as one walks the Seaford road above the valley, the moſt beautiful valley for me in all the South Country. For I never walk upon that road without tears in my throat, in young and innocent early morning, through windy noon or quiet dusk. It has a candid and beautiful simplicity which no words can paint. Over the low mossy wall the lush fields drop to the ſtreams or blue spaces of clear water, flowing imperceptibly to the sea, and broken by the reeds and the wild duck, and an occasional heron in flight. From the fringe of trees above the right bank of the road scatters a riotous chorus from the thrushes and blackbirds gathered there. Through the grey branches the sky is deep and blue as a ſtained glass window. There is a farm or two rich in soft greens, yellows and reds, of roof, barn and outhouses, where the brown cattle turn mild eyes from the wet earth about their feet. The smell of good English mud mingles with that of damp leaves, with granary and hayrick smells. The cloud shadows pass in

slow procession across the farther hills, beyond the water, until they are lost to sight in the deep cutting that drops to the farm in the hollow, where the chimney smoke ascends blue and straight against the dark trees edging the lower slopes of Hindover (High and Over). From the turf upon the summit the valley lies revealed in translucent beauty, cut by the shining ribbons of the waters across the marshes where the cattle graze, and penetrating up to Alfriston's spire round the bend of the hills. The end of the ridge looks steeply down to Birling Gap and the broad waters of the Channel, with the outreaching ships on the far horizon, and the path of the sun widening to the land. Lifted up in space here, one knows the peace of Heaven. Valley and hill are bathed in golden light, and in summer there will be gorse with its heady scent blazing on the slopes beneath, and the larks singing wildly above. It is sweet in April to lie beneath the blackthorn, while the petals flutter across the drowsy eyelids, and the valley distances take on a deeper purple as the sun climbs the sky. There, close beside, but unseen beneath a bush, the young Chloe awaits in happy patience her Daphnis, returning with the strayed flocks and a chaplet on his hair ; awaits that peaceful hour when she shall sit with him and sing softly as he plays upon his oaten pipe. . . . On Sabbath mornings the bells ring up faintly from the valley, where 'little lost Down churches praise the God who made the hills.' There is no other sound but the whistling cry of the shepherd, who will delight the ear with no old traditional melody, but more likely the modern and inappropriate strains of 'All by yourself in the moonlight!' . . . It is unpleasant to reflect that the serene look upon the faces of these shepherds may be born not only of earth's content, but of that imbecility which is the result of the prevailing intermarriage. For, despite the motor 'bus

and the wider interests of the time, this corner of Sussex remains very clannish, suspicious of the prying stranger, superstitious as any Irish peasant, and of habits that are neither clean nor hygenic. The cottage window is tightly closed in all weathers here as elsewhere, and almost every family can recall a half-wit somewhere among its relatives. The labourer's breakfast is still bread and cheese and onions, though I find no fault with that, since doubtless it suits his stomach and his pocket best; it forms his supper also, with a little fat bacon that also breaks the children's monotonous diet of bread and dripping. It is no wonder that the faces of the boys and girls are white and their eyes heavy; that they lack entirely that grace and quick intelligence that the poorest Cockney gamin displays, as they clatter clumsily along the village street to school, to receive new ideas that are strongly suspected and frowned upon in the home.

Past the church and across the wooden bridge from Alfriston, an old chalk track winds and climbs across the lower slopes of Windover. There seems to be bird-music in those hedges in all seasons, though the calls of robin and wren grow fainter as the days are colder. Then are they appreciated most—the staunch friends who do not fly winter's drought and trouble. Then are they truly loved, when there is not the sweet and swiftly-increasing confusion of spring and summer to distract. The nightingale upon the background of enchanted summer night is an overrated leading-lady, who has nature's choicest gifts to help her. My heart is more tender to the little humble birds of winter, who make brave music and flutter, without fuss, about me in the disconsolate days. . . . Past the little church of Lullington hidden in the trees, there is solitude all the way to Wilmington, broken only by the cottages of Milton

Street down in the valley, and the plough horses and the sheep on the lower pastures. Beside the dewpond strays an isolated flock raggedly across the turf, and the tinkle of the bells in their different tones is as the faint music of a dulcimer. . . . Mr. Thurston Hopkins, the well-known Sussex writer, includes an interesting chapter on the sheep bells and shepherds' crooks of the Downs in the pocket volume published last year, *The Lure of Sussex*. He assumes that:

'. . . . the first sheep bells were made to warn the flint-men of a night attack on the folds by wolves; or perhaps they served a double purpose, firstly that of amulets and secondly as warning-gongs. The custom of hanging bells on the necks of horses, cows, and other animals, was in use by the Romans, and still survives in Switzerland, Egypt, Palestine and all the English counties. I have observed the various makes of Sussex sheep bells for twenty years and can only find two distinct types, which one might say are native to the Downs. The first was a box-like body called the canister sheep bell, and the second with a wedge-shaped body, known as a cluck bell or "clucket." A third type of bell has been mentioned by several writers as a Sussex sheep bell; but territorial history will not approve of its acceptance as such. I refer to the spherical bell which is called by farm-hands and shepherds a "rumbler." It runs in size up to five inches in diameter and is made of brass or bell metal, with a slot cut beneath along which a metal ball rolls backwards and forwards, the whole giving forth a rumbling sound. This bell is the ancient crotal, and belongs more specifically to riding and sleigh horses than to sheep. It is interesting to note that crotals, exactly like those used as horse bells, were found in British graves suspended to the spears of warriors. The crotal, of course, is not used for waggon-horses, a fact that is

hardly necessary to mention since the sets of cup-bells are still to be seen and heard on our Downland farms.'

The plain grows bluer and wider as one climbs, reaching across woods and little square fields and far church towers through veils of purple to the Kentish Weald. In June the distance is blurred with heat, and one may lie on the farther slopes above Jevington, that look across to Pevensey and the Channel, and when the lark has paused above, know that crystal silence of the Downs that is ecstasy in memory. It is pleasant to go up there in the cool scented sweetness of an April evening after rain, and while the rabbits scurry across the wet turf, gather the wild violets in basketfuls. But winter has her splendours too. . . . When the ground was iron with frost beneath the heel, in the teeth of an east wind that had ravaged every cloud from the sky, I climbed the chalk track with this lusty playfellow to the rim of hill that drops sheer above the Long Man, exulting in the strain of the thighs against the ascent, and the deep efforts of the breath. Rough were his embraces that day, and fierce his kisses. The cheeks were stung to icy fire beneath them. Was I not a fitting mate for him, as I faced him at last, sobbing with exultation and a primitive triumph, upon the thin ridge high above the plain, maintaining my balance with difficulty as we met and fought in the bitter solitude? As I flung my arms he caught them gaily, answering my laughter, whistling and rushing and shouting from hill to hill, striking me without ceasing with merry buffetings and Olympian mirth. The earth rocked and the clouds tore fiercely over. Small and human and ineffectual as I was, I was lifted to that high estate of playmate of the Wind. It was god-like privilege and joy.

No one knows the origin of the chalk figure cut from the turf, with the long arms and ape-like proportions that

are suggestive of neolithic man. Some think it was made by the monks of the adjoining Benedictine priory, some consider it a Druid deity, which it more closely resembles. It is 230 feet long, and kept in reasonable order by occasional attention from, I believe, the Sussex Archaeological Society. Mr. Alfred Watkins, in his informative book on *The Old Straight Track*, makes the interesting and authoritative suggestion that the Long Man with his two staves was the earliest surveyor of whom we have record, a ' leyman ' who sighted out the land and helped to form the first tracks and who, by his knowledge and office, was held in awe and reverence by the crude populace of the stone age. He discusses how ' the soldier carries but one spear, the shepherd one crook, the pedestrian one staff, the farmer one pike. The surveyor alone carries two rods. . . . ' Of the many theories it is obvious that this explanation of Mr. Watkins is the most likely to be correct.

At whatever hour I approach Wilmington from the Downland track, I am reminded of those old-fashioned oil-paintings that hung on the parlour wall at home in childhood, for here is the familiar picture of the steep path bordered by primroses, or strewn with autumn leaves, ascending to the church in the trees above the winding road ; here are the fallen log, the low ivied walls, the deep emerald light that one sees seldom in Nature but often in her portrayal. Always I expect the child in a pinafore and an old crone gathering twigs, and sometimes I am not disappointed. The Benedictine priory, for many years used as a farmhouse, has lately been acquired and restored by the Sussex Archaeological Society, and is now of great interest to visitors.

At Alfriston one should call on Mrs. Muddle for the key of the fourteenth century clergy house adjoining the church, which was acquired recently by the National

Trust. There is not much within to see but the hall with its wattle and daub walls and the old cross beams, the uneven stone floor that was probably rush-strewn when in use, and the low, carved, mediaeval doorway which leads to the private quarters of Sir Robert Witt, who occupies the remaining two rooms. Mr. Victor Cook, in his *Story of Sussex*, suggests that the hall was probably used chiefly for the accommodation of the guilds that were a feature of old English country life. Larger and more commanding is the clergy house at West Dean, that lost hamlet tucked in a fold of hills behind the Cuckmere, wearing a singular air of apathy and decay. The old rector is pleased to show you the magnificent stone fireplaces and Gothic embrasures, the secret stair-case, the great beams in the sitting-room and the arched roof in his study above. The grinning face of the church, so like a gargoyle, which mediaeval taste may have devised as a grim joke, meets him every time he steps from his door, but doubtless he is used to those slits of windows so like eyes and that door so like a gaping mouth. There is conclusive evidence that West Dean was that Dene bequeathed by Alfred in his will, for he had lands at Lullington close by; it was to here also that Bishop Asser, an ecclesiastic from Wales, was guided by the Sussex folk to meet the king, on the occasion of the latter's request for scholars. From that meeting sprang the life-long acquaintance which was spent for eight months of every year with the king, and that history and life written in 893 when Alfred was forty-five years of age.

A green path climbs beside the rectory out of West Dean, and crosses a high field or two to drop down suddenly upon Charleston Farm where, as part of the farm-house, stands still that little grey chapel built by Alured, who was the Conqueror's cup-bearer, and old dovecot and broken stone kennel that was probably his also.

The farm has claims to beauty as well as history, for seen from the hillside path, surely no farm in the South country has lichened roofs of lovelier or more varied colour. Above the grey stone walls, down in the wet hollow where the black and white cattle stand contented in their stalls, and the fowls peck about the hayrick, the pink and gold and russet and green-flecked browns of those old roofs look up to the soft sky. Beyond the farm gleams a tree-fringed pond, and a farm-hand in torn brown coat works the old blue pump. A sheep dog barks leaping around him, and a woman comes from a gate with a basket of corn. The beautiful colourful picture in its green cup recalls a little the village of Alciston, at the foot of Firle's shoulder, where one is reminded of George Morland at every turn of the winding lane, where the postman's cottage garden in summer, riotous with lobelia and delphinium, hollyhock and rose, rivals the most highly-coloured picture postcard, and where even the earth takes on a deeper colour. It is a place of flowers, of cowslips in the combes and bluebells in ranks along the hedges, of great barns with roofs of crimson and gold. . . . You may be lost among the farm yards and winding paths of Alciston, but its rustic charm will compensate you.

The view from Firle, upon whose high ridge the walker tramps for four or five miles before dropping down to Lewes, rivals that of Windover. In April I sat upon the steps of a deserted caravan at the top of the steep path, and when the shower had passed, saw the foot of the rainbow come to rest upon a favoured cot and across a brown field below, while the sky grew washed and beautiful and shining, and the sun swept joyously over blue plain and grassy shoulder. The church spires peep from their sheltering trees—Alfriston, Alciston, Selmeston, and Berwick far below; the large plough

horses take the furrows, and there is clear colour as far as the eye can see, of white chalk path and misty coppice, hayricks and farms and sheep-folds breaking the level purple of the plain. After sunset, rosy behind the ridge, slowly an opal dusk slips across the valley, softening the fields and fading spires. The distant sheep bells tinkle faintly, and the moon brightens quickly above in a clear blue sky. The outline of hill grows sharp and black against the west, lemon fading to jade now upon the afterglow of the sun. The air grows cold with approaching frost. Bunkle comes up the hill like a figure out of a George Morland print, an old hat at the back of his head, his cheeks red and eyes bright with the exertion of the climb, and his gun beneath his arm. We watch the distant line of trees together, for small grey forms or quick movement.

'Hear that blackbird? D'ye see how 'e's changed 'is note? Just a twitter and a mutter. There's something about there; 'e's warning 'em. Funny how they all know and help one another. . . .' The silence grows deeper but for distant curlews, and down in the valley a diamond or two of light starts out of the greying mist. One seems very high and alone here beneath the moon. A puff of wind rises. It is difficult to concentrate on the hares, for the valley is so beautiful at this hour. Soon it is too dark to seek any longer for prey, and Bunkle sighs as he unloads and tucks the sack into the capacious pocket of his corduroy. I sigh too, for relief that life has been spared, for the magic of the night over hill and plain, as we slowly and carefully descend through the muddy furrows and brambles of the downward path.

To the north of the Downs and south of that favourite haunt of the motorist—Ashdown Forest, lies a tract of country not so well known perhaps, not so distinctive, to the casual observer perhaps not so impressive, a country

of hidden lanes and little hills, century-old farms and oast houses, secret streams and coppices, a country that years of progress have touched but little. It is the old, abiding Sussex Weald, whose charm creeps stealthily into the heart, the Sussex of the forges and the hammer ponds, of the rustic speech and beliefs, the Sussex that was before the days of the iron industries a wild place of swamp and thicket, and that now, since man's taming, is for at least one of her lovers the most gracious and satisfying country in the world. . . . For, in the words of Hillaire Belloc : ' There is a divine thirst for something that will not perish. . . . And if that thirst is there, it is a proof that there is for us some End and some such satisfaction. For my part, as I know of nothing else, I cannot but seek it in this visible good world. I seek it in Sussex, in the nature of my home, and in the tradition of my blood.'

Except for the ancient names, the caves and the cinder banks buried in the woods, the outcrop of the brown-grey rock here and there through the weald and the bronze waters of the streams, there is little evidence to-day of the great industry that prevailed from the days of Caesar until the late eighteenth century. In those days there was no Black Country of the Midlands and the North, but the Sussex sky instead was red with the glow of hundreds of furnace fires ; the woods for miles were loud with the ring of the axe, and on every forest path the wanderer would meet the oxen and the great horses dragging load after load of timber down to the sea-coast, for the building of the ships. For the smelting furnaces were fed not with coal, but with charcoal, derived from the branches left from the great trunks when they had travelled south. Sussex oak was considered the finest in the land for strength and durability, and it was used for the building of the King's ships and for their repair. There was great

destruction in the woods for hundreds of years, and there was loud complaint in the South Country, so that in 1553 and 1585, during the reign of Elizabeth, laws were passed to restrict the building of iron mills and to forbid the further cutting of the trees, and to stipulate that those who used the roads most frequently should maintain their upkeep. They were very necessary laws, for Mr. Victor Cook, in his informative and interesting *Story of Sussex* states that 'during 1547 two iron mills at Sheffield and Worth appear to have consumed over two and a half million cubic feet of timber in less than two years. In the early part of the seventeenth century it was stated that there were in Sussex alone about 140 forges, using two, three, or four loads of charcoal apiece daily. To meet the demands of such a consumption would probably require between 100,000 and 150,000 acres of woodland under systematic management; without systematic management it would mean the denudation of the forests of southern England, and actually the situation was only saved by the use of coal for smelting, and the transference of the iron industry to the Midlands and the North.' The laws were not well kept, of course, and a surveyor complains in 1607 that folk 'shall find such an alteration within lesse than 30 years, as may well strike a fere lest few yeres more as pestilent as the former will leve few good trees standing in these welds.' Indeed, it has been so, so that, despite her well-timbered appearance, the Weald to-day is largely a country of coppices rather than of very old woods. The linked forests of Worth, Balcombe, and St. Leonard's alone remain. After these old labours it is beautiful in its recovery and repose, and warm still with the vanished touch of living men. Perhaps it is that touch that is part of the Wealden charm, for though a lovely landscape may command admiration and awe, it cannot attract the heart's affection

unless men have lived and loved there a long, long time. That, of course, is the charm of England, above the many splendid kingdoms of the world. . . .

The little village of Maresfield lies in the midst of the Weald, ten miles north of Lewes, in a green hilly district not far from the sandy forest border. To the idler it offers a choice of dignified park lands and open heath, a multitude of grassy tracks and white lanes, woods and streams, and pastures, graced with old grey farms and manors.

There, upon a recent Easter, I met my good friends the Bunkles again, newly installed in the solid old Georgian inn, ' The Chequers,' that stands four-square immediately above a deep lane running beside, and faces the grey tower of the noble old church across the road. The main road to Eastbourne runs through the village, and on either hand along that usually-busy highway there is distasteful display of tea cabins and raw bungalows. Nutley, with its great new hotel designed especially for the needs of charabancers, sprawls unevenly three miles to the north, and the pleasant little town of Uckfield two miles to the south sends out a straggling line of villas that, but for the intervention of a hill or two and a pine-wood, reach almost to Maresfield. And yet the church and the three tiny village shops and inn retain a curious dignity, and breathe upon the quiet air (for even the road to Eastbourne has its hours of country peace) the powerful undying spirit of the past. In the quiet hours of noon, the wains that still bear the oaks and pines from the forest, are drawn up from the low church wall and smell resinous in the sun, while the great horses nod as they await the return of their drivers from the inn. The twentieth century slips away and the eighteenth slips in.

' Some of the noblest oaks in England were formerly found in Sussex. They required sometimes a score of men

to draw them, and were carried in a sort of wain, which in that deep country is expressively called a "tugg." Two or three years was not an uncommon space of time for a tugg to spend in performing its journey to Chatham. One tugg carried the load but a little way, and left it for another tugg to take up. If the rains set in, it stirred no more that year, and sometimes no part of the next summer was long enough for the tugg to proceed. So that the timber was generally pretty well seasoned before it arrived at the King's Yard. I suppose the same mode of carriage still continues.'

This from the pen of William Gilpin, writing in the late eighteenth century.

When dusk has almost become the dark of night, the ploughman lingers on the steps before going heavily home down the deep lane. The lamplight from the open door is gold upon the dark; the church tower rises sombre upon the stars. In the little green-panelled sitting-room above, where the fire burns quietly and the lamp is not yet lit, one stares from the old window seats upon the tall limes that wave softly across the tower. The murmur of slow country voices rises from below; the bells ring out a chime, and a startled bird cries from a secret place. It is not then the twentieth century, but again the eighteenth—the age of dirt and brutality maybe, but also the age of leisure and a certain charm. . . . On Sunday mornings early the organ music steals upon you as you sit at breakfast, and the long window frames the procession of the country folk, as they pass out from Mass among the lichened stones of the sunny churchyard and gather in knots about the lych gate. Memory also recalls another early morning, when a heated friend arrived post-haste and hungry from windy fields for breakfast, which he consumed with dangerous speed that he might not miss the London coach. Alas, that there was no flourish of horns, or cries or bustle about the old yard, no clatter of prancing horses to announce the

yellow vehicle as it glided round the bend of the road. . . .

'The Chequers,' so called from a chequer tree that once grew in the long high garden, has a large collection of stables, barns and outhouses. The garden runs along a shelf of land that commands a fine view of green hillsides, an old farm or two, an oast house, sunken cottages with blue smoke ascending, a twisting white ribbon of road, and, far beyond, the line of downs where Caburn and Mount Harry look out to sea. The wind blows freshly there, and there is a great space of sky, and soft air that later shall quicken the strawberry patch, the asparagus bed, and the plums on the south wall. By the time these words appear in print the apples will have ripened on those gnarled old boughs, that, seen from the wicket gate at the garden's end, throw a grotesque tracery across the church tower over the inn gables. There will, I hope have been a good crop of peas and beans, and salads and fruits of all kinds to fill the hands of Mrs. Bunkle generously, and to give full scope to those culinary arts of which she is such intelligent mistress. As I write, the young shoots await the April rains and the long warm days of May, and the buds are still tender on the boughs. The grass is thin under the fir tree, whose close branches will offer such pleasant shade when summer is come, and that even now is thick with dark leafage upon the deep blue sky of spring.

One awakes early at Maresfield, blinking into the face of the newly-risen sun that floods the bedrooms over the gables with golden light. There are three sounds at that hour, loud upon the murmur of fluttering wings, that make pleasant music for drowsy ears —the blackbird on the fir branch telling the same song each morning, a crooning dove in the coppice, and the ring of the blacksmith's anvil from the forge under the

hill. Later, in that blithe hour which for birds is the most energetic of the day, the trio becomes a chorus. Alice, sweet-voiced as she is sweet-natured, comes singing up the stairs with the morning tray, and Smuggler, the terrier, patters joyfully behind her. Who would not be young and happy and care-free on such a morning? Down by the lea, starred now with yellow celandines, the shaggy little foal crunches at the sweet hay. It is good to feed him and stroke his cold nose, and to meet the mild glance of his brown eyes. The thrushes sing riotously in the thin branches that still are bare with winter, but there is promise in the anemones that carpet the bank across the stream, and certainly promise in the tender morning sky and the sweet air, that one gulps in great draughts as if indeed it were the nectar of the spirit. A simple stone house, the Gate House Farm, stands between pond and orchard in the hollow at the lane's curve. It displays within a profusion of old beams and great stone inglenook fireplaces, ancient floors and low ceilings, and deep window seats that frame pictures of lawn and the big drooping tree, of the pine across the water, or the orchard upon the sky. Within, it appears to be a house not only of great age, but of a most gracious atmosphere that not all old houses possess. One feels that difficulties would be easier to meet and master there, and happiness come more readily, for though but a thing of stone, it suggests also the personality of a steadfast friend, whose thoughts, calm and good and kind, are forever shelter and sustenance.

The commanding gate of a once-noble estate—Maresfield Park—faces the inn. Occupied in the early eighteenth century by the Shelleys, a family as old as the Conquest, later by a German count and during the war by the soldiers, it has been sold in lots and is rapidly becoming a new housing estate of large detached residences. Still

there are bluebells and daffodils in the woods, and primroses under the hedges, but soon these will be no longer for the wanderer's plucking. There is but an unimpressive portion of the old house left, but at the very far end of the Park, where the old rural character re-asserts itself in wet pasture, spinney and tumbled green land, close by a green track known as the old coach road, there stands alone the most beautiful (and I suppose the oldest) house in Maresfield. It bears the old name of Marshall's Manor, and stands, a tribute to the Jacobean age, low-fronted, quiet and austere beside a twisting brook that plashes over vivid mossy stones. The mullion lattices swing out upon the clipp'd lawns, and the sunlight slants through a little birch wood to fleck the old grey stone with patterned shade. Beside it, a yew tree spreads wide arms above the sundial, and beyond, backed by the deep blue sky, a noble and ancient wall, of solid blocks of stone, rises above the steps that mount to the terraces of the kitchen garden, with its orchard trees and homely peace. The great beams and the old bell at the back of the house testify to the centuries they have known, and the stable roofs over the grey wall soar in lovely lines above the boughs of twin beech trees that are little older than themselves. Within, there are curving beams almost the span of the solid tree, and a great oak staircase worn and sturdy, and old floors of oak whose like you will seldom see to-day. The ghosts of the past crowd about the stranger there, not cold unhappy ghosts, but kindly contented men and women dead long since, and children who have been born there and played there. The tablets and tombs in the church tell of those who lived there, and were privately baptised there. Upon that spring morning, as I wandered round the manor, the elms in the grass wore rings of white and purple crocuses at their feet, daffodils starred the birch wood;

and the boughs of the beeches, the sun-flecked wall and stable roofs made a grey symphony upon the blue sky of April that memory will never forget. The house awaited a tenant then. I pray its future owner will not deface its beauty and tradition. It craves old brocades and tapestries, lutes and viols, and the sweep of silken skirts over the grass—impossible things in this mechanistic age. But more than these material tokens of respect, it beseeches graciousness of thought and habit to dwell there, a gentle tenor of life that is in harmony with its dignity and grave repose. For this is the service of Beauty, to mould us stealthily in its own image, and a humble readiness shall enable it the quicker to have its way with us.

At the edge of the curving wood, close by the manor and the farm of Flitterbanks, the last of the iron caves may be seen, with the old veins in the sandstone, and the marks of picks upon the rocky walls. It is but a small place now, with low roof and wet floor, where the young bullocks seek coolness in midsummer. There are tunnels running through to the other side of the hill, which gave shelter to smuggler's goods in the past, but these were walled up long ago. It is a satisfying spot, where the anemones tangle in the briars of the old high wood, and the wind brings the scent of the soil across the pastures. A grey day seems to draw out its beauty best, for, as the eye roves lovingly over coppice and fence and standing cattle, and all the simple lines of the fair Sussex landscape unspoiled by time, as the cheek meets the fresh wind that blows from the low sky, it appears most truly England—the England of reticence and dignity, of simplicity and an all-embracing tenderness.

In Buxted Park, not far away, the young deer that gather about the stream there are so tame that I think the pretty creatures would almost feed from the hand. They are a most gentle decoration to the pastures and the groves

of grey beeches. Running noiselessly across the turf after sunset, or ſtanding taut and watchful upon the high ground, they seem not creatures of earth but spun of twilight shadows, fearful of man, not because he is a creature of force but because he is a creature of clay, while they are fairy folk and can recognise no other. In Buxted Park, too, leading from the main lodge gate, ſtretches a moſt noble avenue of pines, which soar bare and ſtraight to an enormous height, so that the foliage looks very far away againſt the sky. Is it a natural process of spring that gives the bark of the pine in April its rosy blush—as if the blood of the tree then pulsed more ſtrongly within than at any other time? The effect of that long avenue of high, flushed pines at dusk, with sunset ſtill red in the weſtern sky, was ſtartling and inexpressibly beautiful.

At the beginning of Buxted village a ſtone house ſtands solidly above the road, with the black figure of a hog and the date 1581 carved into the ſtone above the porch. Here at that time lived one Peter Hogge, who in his foundry near by caſt the firſt iron cannon ball made in England. Previous to this they were made of ſtone, and these old balls are found ſtill during excavations. The rock is evident again at Buxted, where it rises in a great hillock by the roadside, and a long shelf of it, dear to the scrambling village children, runs along a meadow's edge and under a high wood to the north of Uckfield. There is an engaging path from Maresfield that drops down through the woods upon it.

It was a 'pretty day' (to use a favourite local phrase) when I took the road from Hadlow Down through the weald to Rotherfield. The road that runs from Buxted to Mayfield through the village of Hadlow Down commands fine views of landmarks along the downs, Birling Gap and Cuckmere Haven, Mount Harry and

Caburn, and sometimes distant Chanctonbury. To the north the weald stretches wide and lovely, a country of farms, to the forest ridge. Upon that blowing April day, when great storm clouds rose above the rifts of blue, and the sun chased like a madcap down the lanes and from field to field, lighting windows to diamonds, and bringing out the glowing colours of lichened roofs and fields and newly-painted gates, the weald revealed itself in all its beauty. Truly, it had a 'dim blue wooded goodness' under the slanting silver light, with its grey church steeples, and rolling pasture crowned by woods, and mill streams that sparkled in the sun. Very old farms, mills and oast houses, prosperous still, were with me all the way along the white twisting road that climbed and dipped the five miles to Rotherfield. There is nothing much to note in the sleepy village, but does the reader know of the highly-interesting tablet by the north door of the church there, which commemorates the Will of one Bertoald, duke of the South Saxons, made in the year 792? For its suggestive flavour of the pagan past, and the evidence of the healing powers of the early Christians, I quote it here:

'In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I, Bertoald, fell into a sickness of which none of the doctors was able to heal me, but I heard that in Gaul, at a monastery of the holy martyrs Dionysius, Rusticus, Eleutherius, of which the venerable Soleradus is Abbot, many miracles had happened through these saints, and, getting a passage from the Emperor Charles, I came hither. There . . . I was completely healed. Therefore I vowed an offering to God and those saints, and I brought with me the protection gained from their sacred relics, and in their name I built a church on my estate in the property called Redrefeld. . . . Therefore with the favour of my brother Eadbald and the consent of my advisers by this testament

I bequeath to the holy martyrs of God, Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius to have and control and hold for ever all that my estate which is called Redrefeld, situated on the river Salforda in the county of Sussex, in jurisdiction of Chichester, with an appendage, lands, fields, pastures, plains, woods and streams, just as I hitherto used to possess there. I bequeath also the harbours of my estate in the same jurisdiction on the sea, Hastings and Pevensey, with the saltmarshes and all appurtenances thereof. But if anyone shall attempt to take aught from these bequests, to lessen them or to usurp them, or shall take them from these saints, and the monks who serve them, he will sin against the everlasting God, and may God, at the judgement to come, require of him what he has unjustly stolen, when He shall come in His Majesty. . . .

Written in the year of our Lord's incarnation 792, in the 31st year of the reign of King Offa, in the presence of my brother Eadbald, and before the underwritten witnesses, I Bertoald, Duke, have confirmed and witnessed. . . . '

(Here follow the names of the witnesses, Eadbald, Edelwin, Eadbert, Edelfred, Egfrid, Cimgils, Hunwlad, Eanfric.)

' I, Deodatus, monk, have taken over from the hand of the Duke Bertoald all things which are written in the will, in the names of the holy martyrs Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius to be possessed, and I have sealed the transfer according to this will in the presence of all the brothers in this monastery.'

Translated from the *Monasticon Anglicanum*.

I have said that Ashdown Forest stretches to the north not far from Maresfield. Despite its attractions for the motorist and the bungalow dweller, and a certain air of sophistication that these have given to its many miles of

wild country, it has its history and points of interest still. The Vechery Wood, not far from Nutley and five miles from Maresfield, covers the reputed site of the 'Palace at Meresfield,' which was the hunting box of Edward II in the early fourteenth century, when the forest yielded the best of sport for His Majesty. It was also known as John O' Gaunt's Palace, since it was also the resort of the king's son of that name, and the refuge of Wycliffe the reformer at the time of his persecution and banishment, to whom John O' Gaunt gave his ready protection and patronage. So that upon this spot was doubtless compiled much of the work that went to the making of the English Bible. Near Duddleswell on the opposite hill, and marking one of the highest points of the forest, stands an isolated clump of trees known still as the King's Standing Ground, where Edward is reputed to have stood to watch the progress of the hunt. For 300 years at that time the Forest was preserved as a royal hunting ground, divided into swards and lodges, and protected by a staff of verderers, foresters and keepers. The old associations linger in the names of the district still—in Hindleape, Woodgate, Forest Row, Great Wildgoose Wood, etc. It is over a hundred years ago since the deer were seen there, and most of the wild life has been scared away long since from those fire-blackened miles of high rolling heath and pines, where the litter of the picnicing motorist now tangles in the heather and the gorse, and where the shelter of the hollows and the combes has been utilised for farms, villas and bungalows. But, except at week-ends, there is solitude there still under that great sweep of sky, and impressive effects of colour upon the distance at sunset and dusk, and on days of sun and shower. The woods around Danehill and Hindleape and Chelwood Gate are particularly romantic and beautiful, and have suffered least of all from intrusion.

But the touch of the times is upon the Forest, and though I am aware that it is also to be noticed further south, yet it does not penetrate much beyond the main roads. The woods and pastures and bye-lanes of the Weald are mostly Nature's still.

The footpath-wanderer is aware of it as he searches for a track that goes from Flitterbanks Farm across a lane or two, and over the gentle inclines of the hills to Fletching, or from the path beside the bridge and the pines on the Newick Road. He will meet none going that way except perhaps a cowherd, and Fletching spire will beckon him very soon, lifting up from the pastures as he mounts. It stands tall and grey and noble beyond the farmyard byres and is a most beautiful structure, early English I should think, possessing three lancet windows of the old and famous *grisaille* glass, and some fine tombs. Gibbon the historian is buried at Fletching, and the avenues and paths of the adjacent Sheffield Park, where he stayed on several occasions, were well known to him. The model village is comparatively new, but satisfying in its lines of grey roofs and gables, and of a most neat appearance.

Upon that Easter the interior of the church was beautiful with the Easter lilies, the branches of palm and the jonquils, and the ring of violets, white and blue, about the font. It is a great pity that we have the habit of making our churches fragrant with flowers only at stated times of festival. Would not the Lord be pleased if we set bluebells about the pillars when May is come, and roses and honeysuckle in midsummer, and all blossoms in their season until winter, when even then the scarlet berries He would not despise? The revival of a pagan custom, but what of that? In the austere English church, among the hushed (and mostly disinterested) kneeling figures, one is often beset by the thought that the worship of the

pagans was a more splendid thing than the worship we bring to our Christian Lord. For theirs was the worship of blood and brain and spirit, all three, and they brought the loveliest things they knew to lay before their gods—garlands and the music of flutes and timbrels, the prowess of strong young limbs, the graceful and joyous dances of youth and the songs of children, the fruits of the earth and the fair products of their hands—all things that their love of the sun and the green earth and lusty happy life induced in them. In gratitude to our God we bring our meagre gifts formally at Easter, at Harvest Festival and Christmas, expressions of a worship that is formal and meagre, a thing set apart from the natural impulses of the heart. It is hardly our fault. Modern Christianity has taught us to restrain and control rather than to release and direct; that virtue resides in the negative and the half-tones of conduct and attitude; that love of earthly beauty and of heavenly beauty are incompatible. Alas, alas, for the fetters that man has placed upon his soul! When our worship swells again strong and free and spontaneous, in the natural music of the spirit, it shall teach us, I hope, better ways to praise the Lord of Beauty, who is greater than all the gods of Olympus.

Fletching has also known the taut suspense that warriors endure before battle, for here in the thicket that prevailed at that time were gathered in the October of 1244 the supporters of Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, the night before he met Henry III upon Mount Harry to overthrow the oppressions of that tyrannical king. The old Earl, one of the most just and beloved men of his period, was not anxious for fight, but only for justice for the people, and at the eleventh hour sent the Bishops from Fletching to endeavour to prevail upon the King, who was camped in the great Priory at Lewes, and holding revels before the very altars. But

they were met only with scorn and laughter, and returned sadly in the darkness. Religiously but valiantly Simon's men marched south into battle very early next morning, and, despite the terrible loses, it was by his strategy and cool judgment that the day was won, and certain redresses for the wrongs of the people made possible.

Very long ago. . . . The dusk was shadowy about the tall spire and the village gables, and the blackbirds were singing loudly as I left the white lane for the pastures and the faint thread of the homeward path. The air was still and faintly cold, and the clear west still ruddy from the afterglow of the sun. The smoke rose straightly from the farm chimneys in the hollow, and the grass smelled sweet. Soon it was very quiet, and the stars came out, and the curves of the hills became sharp and black upon the sky. At that hour one knew that not from history books alone was derived the sense of long peace upon a land, the knowledge that the composure of this old quiet country came not yesterday. It breathed deeply, regularly, there in the night with the security of the monotonous centuries. . . .

Maresfield is set in a country of streams. One meets them everywhere, in the meads and the woods, beside the lanes and under the hills, like artful children lying in wait. There is a long wood near Birchgrove, north of Horsted Keynes, a secret, lovely place where a twisting brook links a chain of five lakes. The brown water runs impulsively this way and that, here and there deeply under brown leaves, hiding under a shady bank, or widening out to a pool. In your efforts to follow it you must cross it many times, startling the wild things under the banks that clutch timorously at life, the hare in the thicket, the snakes in the grass. The trees lean closely, the boughs sweeping the water, the gnarled trunks dipping their feet. Here is heard no sound all day but

the scream of the jay and the drum-notes of the woodpecker, or a shirr of ruffled water as the wild duck rise from the pools. The great ſtretches of clear water mirror the sky, and for mile upon mile in that foreſt sanctuary there is a murmuring and bird-haunted peace. It will be beautiful in summer there. A mile or so from Sheffield Green or Fletching, in the midſt of woods, lies one of the old hammer ponds. The high path goes ambling and twiſting for perhaps a mile, through the drift of leaves above the ſtream which serves the lake. Young birches spring from the great rocks, where doubtless evidence of iron caves and cinder banks is to be found, and at the head of the lake the old mill, whitewashed and heavily-beamed, browses in its hollow ſtill. There are pictures here on every hand for the artiſt, gentle compositions of soft colour and gracious lines, wherein roof and gate and tree, bridge and water, or hayſtack beneath the white galleons of the April sky, assemble themselves very delightfully. And moſt beautiful of all farms are the Sussex farms and mills, serene with peace and plenty or ſtilled paſt their use, made gracious by the passage of the centuries, and warm with the long contact of things of the earth. How richly they express the spirit of the old quiet country in which they are set, and man's erſtwhile-content with it. We who love Sussex to-day know that it is not alone for her paſtel tints, and sweet air, the simplicity of her great spaces, but because of the peace and prosperity that centuries of humankind have found in her. Walking the old tracks, we are one with all who have gone praising and giving thanks before us. By the Furnace Pond upon that Good Friday it seemed indeed the Holy Tide. None were there but a pair of swans who lifted proud necks hopefully under the bank for food, and the ruſtling feathered things in the dry bracken in the woods. The sun of April shone benign and warm,

flecking the lake and caressing the birches, luring scent from the grass and the pushing twigs. There were primroses half-hidden under the leaves, and here and there a white violet. I felt the happy stirring of earth beneath me, heard the first tremulous notes of that gentle music, that ere many months were past, would swell into the great chant of summer. All things seemed to sing softly there in the sun : ' Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is over and past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come.' The Holytide of the English spring—so shy, so sweet. The white feet of April on the grass, the touch of her light fingers on the boughs. The Holytide of Easter on the heart, so long sealed in winter, in indifference, in callousness. The tears of release and joy rose in my throat, and I buried my face among the young shoots of the ferns for love of her, sweet April who is the handmaid of the Lord.

But the stream I loved best at Maresfield was a most humble little brook by a green track that ran into the woods at Piltdown. The path thereto is not far from the road, but once upon it one is embraced by a solitude and a quiet that is the legacy of the centuries. In a moment of time the world and the period is forgotten and sunny Arcadia beckons. Perhaps it was that recognition, which is love at first sight, that brought the throb to the blood the first day I walked there. There was reverence as well as excitement in my fingers as they opened the farmyard gate, as I passed along the meadow's edge and round by the coppice to what sweet discoveries I knew not. By the farm, and spaciously set, a great stone barn stands upon the sky. Behind it tosses a line of noble, wind-blown pines, that upon that first morning of acquaintance, burned upon the deep blue sky with the ardour of crusaders. Has no artist ever discovered that

grey barn with its line of soaring trees? The track goes on through windy fields, and skirts a hedge where the primroses wink from the hollows, past a wood where pheasants and partridges rise startled from the mysterious brake. A square grey house with mullioned windows stands at the meadow's corner, with an old mill stone sunk in the turf before it. The facing woods draw closer, there is sight of a little bridge, and the pulses quicken as one comes nearer to the music of the water. Such a little brook it was, curving under banks of anemones and wild daffodils, a clear brook dear to the otter and the vole and an occasional trout, and the exploration of the wild duck. I cannot say why it sang of Greece and the Golden Age, for it was like so many other little brooks. There, upon its green banks in the sunny solitude of a hot morning, two who had been acquaintances met as friends, and knew that simple lyric happiness in the hour and in themselves of which none have truly sung but Theocritus, and he but faintly. For such things are spun of leaves and wings, and scent and air and water, and of the curious fluttering spirit hidden in the clay. We have no means of telling them. The brook is there no longer, but has been flooded to a lake that spreads clear and wide on either hand of the green path for the nurturing of trout and wild fowl. The scene is very beautiful there now, and I do not miss the stream, which vanished as all beautiful things must, soon or late, and which babbled for me so sweet a swan song close upon its passing. In memory it has immortal life.

Here, on a breezy morning, I lingered to drink in the fair picture of the blowing ash tree and the green land rising against the milky sky, before wandering on to the clearing where the primroses starred the leaves so thickly that the woodland floor was indeed a carpet. The happy child there plucking primroses alone in the windy

morning, with the doves crooning in the trees above, will never forget the pleasure of that hour, the simple and perfect joy that was tearful behind the eyes.

Here, too, I lay alone one long golden afternoon, rapt on the breast of earth and drowsed by the singing water, until the very sky seemed to lean down and gather me to its arms. Here on all these times I knew revelation and joy, and cannot tell for which of them I love the singing water of the little brook. But, because of these things, the beautiful and perfect hours lifted out of life, the green bank there will be for me for ever a blest and happy place. . . . The woods beyond have a quality like no other woods. The trees there, mostly birch and beech and alder, are young trees, and the pale sun of April glinting on the brambles and the lichens, spun a sweet and silver light. Nymphs must once have known the place, and Pan piped out thin melody from the foot of a slender tree. It seemed that as we walked the narrow path upon that drowsy afternoon the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, the spirits that live in the trees and in the shadowy places, came out and walked with us. We were in the midst of a great company, as in the midst of a glad and mighty music. How many words tell of the privilege and the high estate of that hour, of the sense of eternal youth in the heart and eternal peace in the soul? How shall I tell of the love and the recognition that came from the young trees and the birds in the boughs, from all His creatures near and far, from the sunshine and the very air, so that we were lifted for a space from the world into the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven? My faith bows down as I recall that silver wood, and the blessing of God that encompassed us there, for if earthly life hereafter is forever grey, there is courage and comfort unutterable in the memory of that hour, in its shining promise of immortality.

RECAPTURE

They are waiting for us, the beautiful places,
Their portals wide to the wind and sun,
The tables are spread and the guests are gathered,
The trumpets ringing from tower and turret,
And we shall reach them ere day is done.

Sigh no more for the pleasures over,
The Arcadian days so white and fair,
Culled on earth from Elysian meadows—
The road goes on by valley and forest,
And no man knows what awaits him there.

Sigh no more for the light enchanted
Fading ere it is clearly seen,
From life's grey landscapes ; for the elusive
Face of Truth. At journey's ending
The Real shall be where the Dream hath been.

Forget the ache, the pain and longing
For Beauty's altars, unfound, unwon !
They wait in the distant beautiful places,
Beyond the dust, the cloud, and the tempest,
And we shall reach them ere day is done.

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